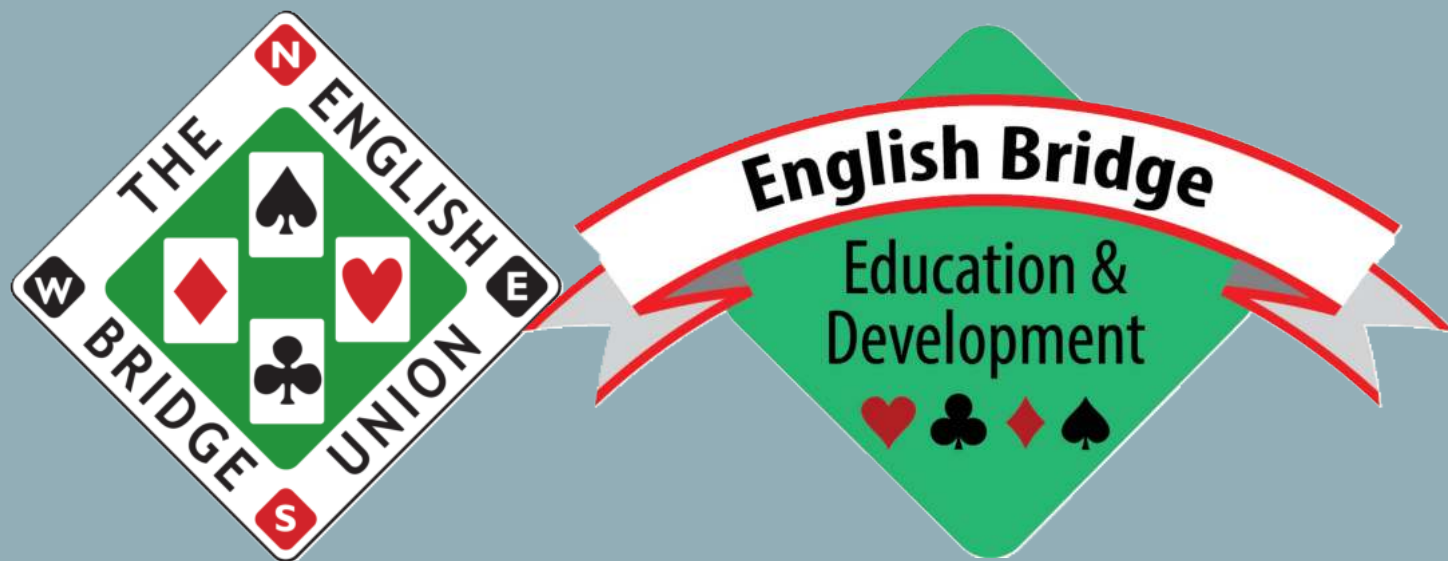


DISCOVERY

EXPERT TIPS TO IMPROVE YOUR CLUB BRIDGE SCORES



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DISCOVERY

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Welcome to the fifth issue of *Discovery* - a publication designed to provide tips and tricks that will help progressing players improve their club bridge scores quickly. We have great bidding and play articles, with our defence section concentrating on ways to read the dummy, how to signal well and when to play a dastardly forcing defence. We have tried to address the pitfalls which so many players fall into when participating in club bridge.

One thing an online-only magazine allows us to do is have interactive hands which you can play. If you, like me, find it quite difficult to follow a hand from a diagram, you can click on the deal, where shown, and play the hand yourself, or see how our expert played it. You will need to be online.

Lou Hobhouse, Editor

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10th Aug	3* Ramsey Park Hotel Ramsey Isle of Man	Duplicate & Trip	up to 7 nts
27th Aug	4* Hotel Torretta Montecatini Tuscany Italy	Duplicate & Trip	up to 10 nts
21st Sep	4* Koral Beach Hotel Oropesa del Mar Spain	Duplicate & Trip	up to 21 nts
4th Oct	4* Barcelo Occidental Hotel Punta Prima Menorca	Duplicate & Trip	up to 14 nts
15th Oct	4* Athena Beach Hotel Paphos Cyprus	Duplicate & Bowls	up to 21 nts
1st Nov	5* Paloma Perissia Hotel Side Southern Türkiye	Duplicate	up to 21 nts
21st Dec	4* Ocean House Hotel Costa Del Sol Spain	Duplicate & Trip	up to 21 nts
8th Jan	4* Playa La Arena Hotel Tenerife Spain	Duplicate & SM Bowls	up to 28 nts
10th Jan	4* Barceló Fuerteventura Mar Spain	Duplicate & Trip	up to 14 nts
31st Jan	5* Rubicon Palace Hotel Playa Blanca Lanzarote	Duplicate & Trip	up to 15 nts
14th Feb	5* Paloma Oceana Hotel Side Türkiye	Duplicate	up to 28 nts
16th Mar	4* Hotel Le Soleil Jesolo Italy	Duplicate & Trip	up to 14 nts
19th Mar	4* Barcelo Pyramids Hotel Cairo Egypt	Duplicate & Trip	up to 10 nts
18th Apr	4* La Zenia Hotel Orihuela Costa Spain	Duplicate & Trip	up to 14 nts
2nd May	4* Mediterranee Hotel Kefalonia Greece	Duplicate & Trip	up to 14 nts
3rd Jun	4* Hotel Torretta Montecatini Tuscany Italy	Duplicate & Trip	up to 10 nts

UK CALENDAR 2025



21st Jul	Last Drop Village Hotel & Spa Bolton	Duplicate & Walk	up to 5 nts
28th Jul	Clarion Hotel Charlecote Stratford-upon-Avon	Duplicate	up to 4 nts
11th Aug	The Crowne Plaza Hotel Harrogate	Duplicate	up to 4 nts
24th Aug	Chesford Grange QHotel & Spa Kenilworth	Duplicate	up to 4 nts
2nd Sep	Marsham Court Hotel Bournemouth	Duplicate	up to 5 nts
7th Sep	Croyde Bay Resort Hotel North Devon	Duplicate	up to 6 nts
14th Sep	Mercure Nottingham Sherwood Nottingham	Duplicate	up to 4 nts
15th Sep	Clarion Hotel Charlecote Stratford-upon-Avon	Improvers	up to 4 nts
18th Sep	The Crowne Plaza Hotel Plymouth	Duplicate	up to 4 nts
2nd Oct	The Feathers Hotel Ludlow	Duplicate	up to 3 nts
13th Oct	The Cairn Hotel Harrogate	Duplicate	up to 4 nts
19th Oct	Marsham Court Hotel Bournemouth	Duplicate	up to 5 nts
27th Oct	Langstone Hayling Island Portsmouth	Duplicate	up to 5 nts
7th Nov	White Swan Hotel Alnwick Northumberland	Duplicate & Gin	up to 4 nts
10th Nov	Clarion Hotel Charlecote Stratford-upon-Avon	Duplicate	up to 4 nts
22nd Nov	Whitehouse Hotel City Centre Worcester	Duplicate	up to 3 nts



Rather than thinking about criteria, certain concepts are best explained by thinking about how similar or different a hand is to another given hand. A helpful way of visualising this is by considering how many cards need to be changed to turn one hand into another.

WHAT IS A BALANCED HAND?

Identifying a balanced hand is usually done in one of two ways. The first is to simply remember the three balanced distributions: 4-3-3-3, 4-4-3-2 and 5-3-3-2. The second is to remember the criteria: no shortage (singleton or void) and no more than one doubleton. Although both lead to identifying balanced distributions correctly, they simply require memorisation rather than an understanding of exactly why these are considered to be balanced hands. In which case, it is no wonder that debates about the treatment of 5-3-3-2 hands arise when the 5-card suit is a major.

Let's now take the changing-a-card approach. First, have in mind what we mean when we say 'balanced': that each suit in the hand has almost the same number of

cards as each other suit. What, then, is the most balanced distribution? 4-3-3-3, clearly: the cards cannot be spread any more evenly given that there need to be thirteen of them.

So, any other balanced shapes must not diverge too far from a 'perfectly balanced' 4-3-3-3 hand. We can even define a balanced hand as one that diverges from a 4-3-3-3 hand by no more than one card. Shall we check what we get?

♠ A 4 3 2 **A**
♥ A 3 2
♦ 6 3 2
♣ A 5 2

Hand A is our perfectly balanced 4-3-3-3 example hand:

Now, move one club into your heart suit. Suddenly the hand is 4-4-3-2.

♠ A 4 3 2 **B**
♥ A 5 3 2
♦ 6 3 2
♣ A 2

♠ A 5 4 3 2 **C**
♥ A 3 2
♦ 6 3 2
♣ A 2

Next, take the 4-3-3-3 hand again and move one club into your spade suit instead. And the hand is now 5-3-3-2!

Despite feeling less balanced than the 4-4-3-2 hand, it does not actually diverge any

further from the original hand than the 4-4-3-2 hand does.

We can also test this method to determine why 5-4-2-2 hands are not balanced. There is no way of making the hand by only moving one card from the original 4-3-3-3 shape. Rather, you must take either Hand B or Hand C and move a card from one of those instead.

♠ A 5 4 3 2 **D**
♥ A 6 3 2
♦ 3 2
♣ A 2

This hand is **two** cards away from the 4-3-3-3 Hand A. It is therefore not balanced (it is *semi-balanced*).

WHAT IS AN ACCEPTABLE SHAPE FOR A TAKE-OUT DOUBLE?

When considering whether you are the right shape for a take-out double of one suit, you probably apply two criteria to your hand. You need at least three cards in each of the unbid suits; and no more than two cards in the suit your opponent bid. This does not actually narrow the shapes down

Continued overleaf

enough! Look at this example:

E Your left hand opponent opens 1♣. You have at least three cards in each of the non-club suits and you only have two cards in clubs. So, technically, you satisfy the criteria for a take-out double; yet this is not a take-out double shape!

This problem can be solved by instead applying the same technique as before: firstly, deciding on the perfect shape for a take-out double and secondly, making sure that other shapes making a take-out double diverge from that by no more than one card. The perfect shape must have 4-card support for each of the unbid suits because then, you are truly content no matter which suit partner picks. As such, 4-4-4-1 hands are ideal! Look at this one:

F

♠	A 8 7 6
♥	A 8 7 6
♦	A 8 7 6
♣	8

G

♠	A 8 7 6
♥	A 8 7 6
♦	A 8 7
♣	8 6

From the ideal Hand F, move one of your diamonds into clubs. A 4-4-3-2 hand is an acceptable take-out shape.

Now move a spade into your diamond suit instead. This hand can also make a take-out double. Note that choosing between doubling and bidding your 5-card suit on such hands requires considering the quality of your longest suit and exactly which two suits you have 5-4 in.

I You are not often dealt this one but if you are, a take-out double describes it nicely.

♠	A 8 7 6
♥	A 8 7 6
♦	A 8 7 6 5
♣	-

Now compare Hand E to your 4-4-4-1 Hand F. To reach the 5-3-3-2 shape, you need to move two cards – one out of each red suit and into each black suit to give you one more spade and one more club. Therefore, the reason not to make a take-out double

with a 5-3-3-2 hand is simply that it diverges from the perfect shape by too much.

You should also double with 18+ points regardless of shape with a view to bidding a suit or no trumps next time around. These are hands that are too strong to make a simple overcall initially.

LET'S PLAY AROUND WITH THIS AS A QUIZ

Now that you see how the concept of changing one card at a time can be applied, we can play a game... I shall give you a starting hand which changes by one card each time and you can decide how each changed card affects your choice of bid.

1 Your partner opens 1♦ and RHO passes. What do you do?

a	b	c
♠ K J 8 7	♠ K 8 7	♠ K 8 7
♥ 6 5 3	♥ 6 5 3	♥ 6 5 3
♦ A 7 5	♦ A 7 5	♦ A 7 5
♣ 7 3 2	♣ 9 7 3 2	♣ A 7 3 2

d	e
♠ K 8 7	♠ K 8 7 4
♥ J 6 5 3	♥ J 6 5 3
♦ A 7	♦ A 7
♣ A 7 3 2	♣ A 7 3

Answers overleaf

♠ K J 8 7 a	♠ K 8 7 b	♠ K 8 7 c
♥ 6 5 3	♥ 6 5 3	♥ 6 5 3
♦ A 7 5	♦ A 7 5	♦ A 7 5
♣ 7 3 2	♣ 9 7 3 2	♣ A 7 3 2

♠ K 8 7 d	♠ K 8 7 4 e
♥ J 6 5 3	♥ J 6 5 3
♦ A 7	♦ A 7
♣ A 7 3 2	♣ A 7 3

W	N	E	S
1♦	Pass	?	

Hand 1a should bid 1♠ – your only long suit and it's biddable at the one level.

Hand 1b should bid 1NT – you can no longer bid your long suit at the one level but are not strong enough to go up to the two level, so the only option is 1NT.

Hand 1c should bid 2♣ – now you are strong enough for the two level, so you can go back to bidding your long suit.

Hand 1d should bid 1♥ – you have two suits to choose from but the hearts are more appealing to bid because it saves bidding space and they are a major.

Hand 1e should bid 1♥ – this time, you are choosing between two suits at the one level and both are majors. Despite the suit quality discrepancy, you should still choose 1♥ to save space. If you have a spade fit, partner has room to bid 1♠ and you can find that fit; if you happen to have a heart fit and bid 1♠, partner might not be strong enough to reverse into 2♥ and you will miss your heart fit.

2 Take the same hands, but this time RHO overcalls 1♥. Now what?

W	N	E	S
1♦	1♥	?	

Hand 2a should double – this is a negative double, showing the other major. Why not just bid 1♠? Use the two options to show a different number of spades: doubling shows exactly four, whereas 1♠ would show five or more.

Hand 2b should Pass – you are no longer obliged to bid, as partner can bid again with a strong hand. You certainly should not bid 1NT without a heart stop (and

should ideally have a slightly better hand – 8-10 points).

Hand 2c should bid 2♣ – this one is hard, but you are now too strong to pass, you are still missing a heart stop and do not have a diamond fit. As mentioned before, a double would promise four spades. Bidding 2♣ on your 4-card suit is the least of the evils.

Hand 2d should bid 2NT – you have a heart stop now (albeit a minimum one) but are too strong for 1NT and not strong enough for 3NT. Bidding 2NT shows an invitational hand with a heart stop and without four spades – accurate.

Hand 2e should double – the fact that you are stronger than before does not affect your way of showing four spades.

Quiz continued overleaf

♠ K J 8 7 a ♥ 6 5 3 ♦ A 7 5 ♣ 7 3 2	♠ K 8 7 b ♥ 6 5 3 ♦ A 7 5 ♣ 9 7 3 2	♠ K 8 7 c ♥ 6 5 3 ♦ A 7 5 ♣ A 7 3 2
♠ K 8 7 d ♥ J 6 5 3 ♦ A 7 ♣ A 7 3 2	♠ K 8 7 4 e ♥ J 6 5 3 ♦ A 7 ♣ A 7 3	

3 Take the same hands, but this time RHO overcalls 1♠. Now what?

W	N	E	S
1♦	1♠	?	

Hand 3a should bid 1NT – you are showing 8-10 points with a spade stop. Here, your hand is likely to provide two spade stops.

Hand 3b should Pass – you have a stop but are not quite strong enough to bid 1NT this time.

Hand 3c should bid 2NT – you have invitational values with a spade stop and without hearts.

Hand 3d should double – this shows at least four hearts and could be one of two hand types that could not bid 2♥: either exactly four hearts (and therefore unable to bid 2♥ since that shows five); or five plus hearts but weaker than 10 points (whereas 2♥ would be 10+ points).

Hand 3e should double – trying to find your major fit takes priority over showing a spade stop. Remember to look for a major fit before suggesting no trumps.

4 Take the same hands, but this time RHO overcalls 2♣. Now what?

W	N	E	S
1♦	2♣	?	

Hand 4a should Pass – there is nothing available at the one level anymore for your weak hand.

Hand 4b should Pass – this hand is even weaker.

Hand 4c should bid 2NT – this shows a club stop with invitational values and no interest in majors.

Hand 4d should double – hands like this are well known to be problematic in this space-consuming auction. You need to investigate the possibility of a heart fit; so partner needs to be aware that you might not necessarily have both majors when you double here. If partner comes back with spades, you can fall back on no trumps with your club stop and your partner should trust you and not insist on spades.

Hand 4e should double – it's always a relief when you really do have both majors.

Quiz continued overleaf

♠ K J 8 7 a	♠ K 8 7 b	♠ K 8 7 c
♥ 6 5 3	♥ 6 5 3	♥ 6 5 3
♦ A 7 5	♦ A 7 5	♦ A 7 5
♣ 7 3 2	♣ 9 7 3 2	♣ A 7 3 2

♠ K 8 7 d	♠ K 8 7 4 e
♥ J 6 5 3	♥ J 6 5 3
♦ A 7	♦ A 7
♣ A 7 3 2	♣ A 7 3

5 Take the same hands, but finally, what do you do if RHO doubles?

W	N	E	S
1♦	Dble	?	

Hand 5a should bid 1♠ – you can still bid your suit at the one level and, while you are weak, you have no need to be ashamed of this hand.

Hand 5b should Pass – you have nothing to say and are no longer obliged to bid.

Hand 5c should redouble – this is a great way of showing points without having to commit to anything in particular. What is more, you might catch the opponents in a doubled contract, as your redouble says to partner, ‘We have the balance of

the points. Either the contract is ours or we double them for penalties!’

Hand 5d should also redouble. You have the opponents’ suits and no fit for partner. Penalties can really mount up on these hands when the opponents bid on,

whereas making game is precarious.

Hand 5e Again, redouble. You may have a major fit but the trump split is likely to be unfavourable whereas a penalty when the opponents bid on is sure to be juicy. □

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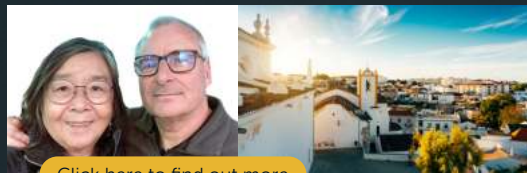


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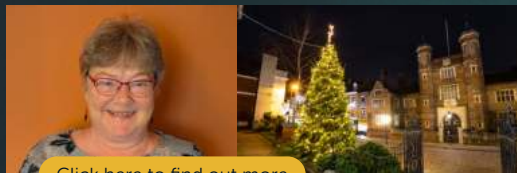
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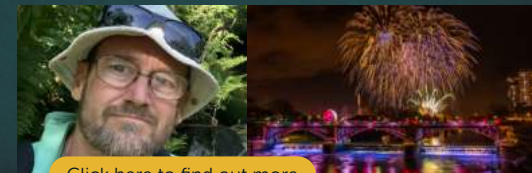
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Bidding in 4th seat after an opening bid has been passed round to you is somewhat of a mystery, in part due to the fact that it doesn't occur that often. As usual things that are rare are shrouded in confusion, and it's important to remember there is a set scheme in place to help us out.

Let us start with an example hand – after the auction shown, what do you bid as West with this fine collection?

West hand		Love All			
♠	Q 2	N	E	S	W
♥	Q 9 4 3	1♥	Pass	Pass	?
♦	A K 8 5				
♣	Q 10 3				

Assume the vulnerability is love all (white), so no one is vulnerable.

Passing out 1♥ is unlikely to score that well, since a few 50s will pale into comparison if you can make a part score, and there is always the possibility that your

side can make a game. Admittedly this would need partner to hold 10 or 11 points and probably a 5-card minor suit, but this is quite possible as partner would not have bid over the opposition's 1♥ opening with such a hand (a 2-level overcall requiring a 6-card suit).

The correct choice is to overcall 1NT, which in the protective position shows 11-14 points and suggests a stopper in the opponent's suit. Why are you allowed to make such a bid when a direct overcall of 1NT (sitting over the opening bidder in second seat) shows 16-18?

Well let's start by reviewing the reasons why you normally need 16-18 points.

- ♣ The next hand might have the lion's share of the remaining values, and double you for penalties.
- ♣ Partner may have nothing – even if you are lucky enough to avoid a double you just don't have enough points and will go down.

- ♣ You want to get your side to a game contract when partner has 8-10 points, a hand on which they might not be able to bid normally.

Now are those dangers still relevant?

The first one is not – since the responder to the opening bid has passed. There is no danger that hand will double you or cause any trouble. It's true that opener might be strong, but even with an 18 count your side is likely to hold around half the points.

Is it possible partner might hold nothing? No, not at all. Responder would always bid with six points, often with five, and sometimes with less and a long suit. Opener will not normally hold a powerhouse, the most common number of points for a player to hold is 10 and it gets less likely the further away you go from that. An opening bid is more likely to be a 12 count than it is a 15 count, than it is a 17 count etc.

A worse case scenario would see partner

Continued overleaf

with at least five points, and even then, getting out for -100 (two down) still beats the -110 they might have got in 1♥+1.

Let's look at a few possible hands which partner might hold and see the outcome in each case:

West hand	
♠	Q 2
♥	Q 9 4 3
♦	A K 8 5
♣	Q 10 3

Love All			
N	E	S	W
1♥	Pass	Pass	?

East Hand 1	East Hand 2	East Hand 3
♠ 10 9 8 4 3	♠ K 10 7 3	♠ K 7 4 3
♥ K 2	♥ J 5	♥ J 5
♦ 7 4	♦ Q J 4	♦ Q 9 3
♣ K J 7 2	♣ K J 8 4	♣ K 8 6 4

East Hand 4	East Hand 5
♠ A J 9 3	♠ K 9 8 6
♥ 2	♥ K 10 7
♦ J 6 3	♦ J 6 3
♣ K J 8 4 2	♣ J 8 4

Hand 1: partner has shown good discipline in not overcalling a grotty spade on a weak suit. They will transfer to 2♠ and leave you there, where you will lose three spade tricks, the ♥A and the ♣A for +110. This will be better than a miracle layout in defence where you get two club tricks, a spade, two hearts, two diamonds and a diamond ruff to beat 1♥ by two tricks.

If the spades break badly and the defence are on the ball, it's possible they may be able to organise a club ruff, but in that scenario you will not beat 1♥, and your score will still improve with bidding.

Hand 2: partner will raise to 2NT (via Stayman) and you will decide whether or not to go on to game. (A good 13 with the ♥9 should probably accept).

You will get two heart tricks, three club tricks, a spade trick and four diamond tricks to make 3NT in comfort. If they don't lead hearts then you will have time to build up eight tricks and North will

have to give you a heart trick at the end for nine anyway.

Hand 3: is very quiet. Partner will pass 1NT. You will make seven tricks comfortably as the defence will have to help you develop tricks whether they lead hearts, clubs or spades. Meanwhile 1♥ rates to lose at most seven or eight tricks. As usual, on the layouts where you get a lot of tricks in defence (opener is 3·4·3·3 for example) then you will easily make eight tricks in 1NT.

Hand 4: will pass 1NT, and again it will be easy to make. Even if the defence can attack hearts and make four heart tricks and the ♣A you still get a comfortable plus score. It is also possible that they carry on competing in hearts (they do have an 8-card fit after all) in that case the East hand will compete (doubling for take-out or showing clubs) and your side will once more buy the contract in something you can make.

Hand 5: is also quiet, and you might ask,

Continued overleaf

‘why are we rescuing the opponents from a silly 4-2 fit?’ The answer is because however much you get from defending, playing the hand will be more lucrative when you know where all the points are. Even if the opponents find a surprise attack in clubs, you can start the heart suit by running the nine and make three tricks there to go with two diamonds, a club and a spade to make easily. Meanwhile we might well take three heart tricks, a club, a spade and two diamonds in defence, but that is still only one down. Once again playing the hand leads to a better score.

The last hand demonstrates an important point, which is that it is very good to put the hand with the high card points on lead. This is something that seems counter intuitive, as surely they are the one that will be directing the defence? However it is a well-known

tactic as they will have to stumble in the dark leading away from honours and guessing what their weak partner actually holds. (Indeed, many defences to a 1NT opening work on the premise of getting the 1NT opener on lead so they can give you tricks by leading away from their honours).

You’ll notice in the above description I mention that partner can use a transfer in response to a 1NT overcall – yes that’s correct. Stayman and transfer apply facing a protective 1NT overcall just as they do a direct 1NT overcall. (In fact the easiest thing to do is to respond to a 1NT overcall the same way you respond to a 1NT opening, to avoid strain on the memory).

In future editions we shall discuss what to do with stronger hands when an opening bid is passed round to you – this is a topic with plenty of information to be shared!

Quiz overleaf



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With neither side vulnerable 1♦ is opened on your left and both partner and right hand opponent pass. Are you going to take any action?

Love All			
N	E	S	W
1♦	Pass	Pass	?

West Hand 1	West Hand 2	West Hand 3
♠ A Q 2	♠ Q J 9 5	♠ A K Q J
♥ K 8 2	♥ K Q J 8	♥ Q 7 4
♦ 10 8 7 3	♦ 7 3	♦ K 9 3
♣ K J 4	♣ K 3 2	♣ J 4 3

West Hand 4	West Hand 5
♠ K Q 10 7 5	♠ 7
♥ 8 4 2	♥ Q 8 5 4 2
♦ –	♦ A K J 9
♣ Q 9 7 4 3	♣ 7 5 4

Hand 1: should overcall 1NT, showing 11-14 points and ostensibly a diamond stopper. Don't worry that ♦10873 isn't a full stopper, the bid describes the character of your hand perfectly and will enable your side to compete the part score.

Hand 2: should double. This time you want to find a major suit fit and are happy with any response partner makes. You might often get away with bidding 1NT but if the opener rebids their diamonds then how is partner going to compete with only 4-card suits?

Hand 3: also doubles, as the point count (16) is too strong for 1NT. Double and then bid 1NT over partner's response (or rebid 2NT if partner responds 2♣). This shows 15-17 and will help you find the best spot. Note that an overcall still shows

a 5-card suit, no matter how tempting those spades are!

Hand 4: bids 1♠ to show the good suit and strong playing strength. Note that partner is almost certainly sitting over declarer with a stack of diamonds waiting for you to double, but your side has so little defence that defending at the one level will be an error, even if partner has AJ982 of diamonds and a side ace.

Hand 5: should pass. Your diamonds are strong, and the singleton spade is very suspicious – where have they all gone? If you bid your emaciated heart suit then it won't come as a huge shock when opener rebids 1♠ and the opponents suddenly compete the part score in their newly found fit. Your partner hasn't bid over 1♦ despite not having that many of them, so the warning signs are all there.

Quiz continued overleaf

This time 1♠ is opened on your right with both sides vulnerable. This is passed round to partner who protects with 1NT (11-14) and the next hand passes. Are you going to take any action?

Love All			
N	E	S	W
1♠	Pass	Pass	1NT
Pass	?		

East Hand 6	East Hand 7	East Hand 8
♠ 4 3	♠ 5	♠ 6 2
♥ K J 9 5 4	♥ Q 9 8 4	♥ A Q
♦ K 4	♦ K J 7 6 3	♦ 9 8 7 5 4 3
♣ 8 6 5 3	♣ Q 5 4	♣ A J 4

East Hand 9	East Hand 10
♠ J 4 3	♠ K J 9 5
♥ Q 8 5	♥ 9 7 4 3
♦ K 7 5 3	♦ K J
♣ K Q 7	♣ A Q 8

Hand 6: responds 2♦, a transfer to hearts, just as it would have done facing a normal 1NT overcall. You can subsequently pass 2♥ and play in a pleasant part score, protecting partner's spade holding from attack at trick one.

Hand 7: has no interest in game, but a clever use of Stayman will get you to the best part score. You will either find your 4-4 heart fit, or partner will reply 2♦ and you can pass. Note that partner should not tell you whether they have four spades since you have no interest in playing in the suit when the opponents have opened it.

Hand 8: can raise to 3NT. You showed great discipline in not overcalling your weak diamond suit, and now is the time to reap the rewards, as you know partner has at least two diamonds and you have loads of entries to establish the suit. Even if

partner only has ♦Jx the suit will normally split and come good for three tricks.

Hand 9: should pass. Remember that partner's range is 11-14 and you are more likely to go off in 2NT than you are to miss a game by passing. Your 4-3-3-3 heap of cheese lacks any playing strength or gravitas and taking the low road is the most sensible action.

Hand 10: can raise to 3NT, and ignore the possibility of a 4-4 heart fit. You have 25-28 points between you and several stoppers in every suit. The last thing you want to do is play in a feeble 4-4 heart fit and run the risk that they break badly. Holding such a strong spade suit in the face of a 1♠ opener it is very likely that the weak hand has a singleton, so playing in hearts runs the risk of losing spade ruffs as well. ☐



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In this summer's special bidding quiz, you are West playing match-pointed pairs at Love All.

Hand 1

♠ Q 5 3 2
♥ K Q 9 4
♦ K 8
♣ J 10 2

W	N	E	S
Pass	Pass	1NT	Pass
2♣	Pass	2♦	Pass
?			

Hand 2

♠ K 8 7 4
♥ 6 5 3
♦ A 7
♣ A J 7 3

W	N	E	S
?		1♦	Pass

Hand 3

♠ Q 10 6
♥ 8 6
♦ A K J 4 3
♣ A Q J

W	N	E	S
1♦	1♥	1♠	Pass
?			

Hand 4

♠ 7 3
♥ A J 8 2
♦ A Q 9 5 2
♣ J 2

W	N	E	S
1♦	1♠	Dble	Pass
?			

Hand 5

♠ K 8 2
♥ A J 8
♦ 9 7 4
♣ 9 6 3 2

W	N	E	S
?		1♦	Dble

Hand 6

♠ K 8 7 4
♥ 6 5 3
♦ A Q 7
♣ A 7 3

W	N	E	S
?		1♦	2♣

Hand 7

♠ K 8 4 2
♥ A J 9 4
♦ K 10
♣ Q 10 6

W	N	E	S
?	1♠	Pass	Pass

Hand 8

♠ J 8 7 6
♥ 10 9 7 3
♦ A K 4 2
♣ 2

W	N	E	S
Pass	Pass	1NT	Pass
2♣	Pass	2♠	Pass
?			

Answers p18

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Hand 1

♠ Q 5 3 2
♥ K Q 9 4
♦ K 8
♣ J 10 2

W	N	E	S
			1♣
Pass	Pass	1NT	Pass
2♣	Pass	2♦	Pass
?			

2♦. Your Stayman enquiry has asked whether partner holds a 4-card major and the answer is 'no'. You thus revert to no trumps but how high should you go? Remember that partner's protective 1NT overcall is like a weak no trump opening, so an invitational 2NT suffices.

Hand 2

♠ K 8 7 4
♥ 6 5 3
♦ A 7
♣ A J 7 3

W	N	E	S
		1♦	Pass
?			

1♠. In responding to partner's opening bid, your priority is to show a major. This takes precedence both over showing the clubs (which in fact you will not show at all unless partner bids them) and over showing that you have a balanced hand (which you will probably do on the next round).

Hand 3

♠ Q 10 6
♥ 8 6
♦ A K J 4 3
♣ A Q J

W	N	E	S
1♦	1♥	1♠	Pass
?			

3♠. You need to remember that partner's 1♠ response after the intervening 1♥ overcall promises at least a 5-card spade suit. This being the case, 3-card support is adequate for raising the suit, even when as here your overall strength means that you need to make a jump raise. With 17 HCP, a simple raise to 2♠ will not do.

Answers continued overleaf

Hand 4

♠ 7 3
♥ A J 8 2
♦ A Q 9 5 2
♣ J 2

W	N	E	S
1♦	1♠	Dble	Pass
?			

2♥. This is not a strength-showing reverse. The vast majority of the time partner will hold four hearts for the negative double of the 1♠ overcall. In effect you are supporting hearts rather than introducing the suit. Holding a minimum opening bid you 'support' hearts at the minimum level.

Hand 5

♠ K 8 2
♥ A J 8
♦ 9 7 4
♣ 9 6 3 2

W	N	E	S
		1♦	Dble
?			

1NT. On many deals when the hand on your right doubles the opening bid for take-out, you make the same response as you would have done without the double. You have a balanced hand with no 4-card major, too weak to respond at the two level but too strong to do nothing at all.

Hand 6

♠ K 8 7 4
♥ 6 5 3
♦ A Q 7
♣ A 7 3

W	N	E	S
		1♦	2♣
?			

Dble. Although you have a balanced hand and a club stopper, it would be premature to bid 3NT. For all you know, partner could hold four spades and be short in clubs, in which case a spade contract could well play better than a no trump contract. If partner bids 2♥, you are strong enough to take further action with 3NT.

Answers continued overleaf

Hand 7

♠ K 8 4 2

♥ A J 9 4

♦ K 10

♣ Q 10 6

W	N	E	S
	1♠	Pass	Pass
?			

1NT. In second seat you would not have the option of a 1NT overcall because that would show similar strength to a strong 1NT opening. Here in fourth seat, after opener's partner has passed, it is an option, and one you should take. While sometimes you will miss a heart fit if partner has four hearts but has an unsuitable hand for a 2♣ Stayman enquiry, 1NT is more descriptive with the spade stopper and balanced hand. By bidding 1NT you protect your ♠K either if you play in no trumps or if you play in hearts following a transfer or Stayman enquiry from partner.

Hand 8

♠ J 8 7 6

♥ 10 9 7 3

♦ A K 4 2

♣ 2

W	N	E	S
			1♣
Pass	Pass	1NT	Pass
2♣	Pass	2♠	Pass
?			

Pass. Should you go looking for game now that you have found a spade fit? Once you remember that the maximum number of points partner holds for the reopening 1NT overcall (14) you have your answer. You should pass, feeling fairly confident that you have improved the contract compared to leaving partner in 1NT. It was your intention with this hand to pass whatever reply you got to your 2♣ enquiry. ☐



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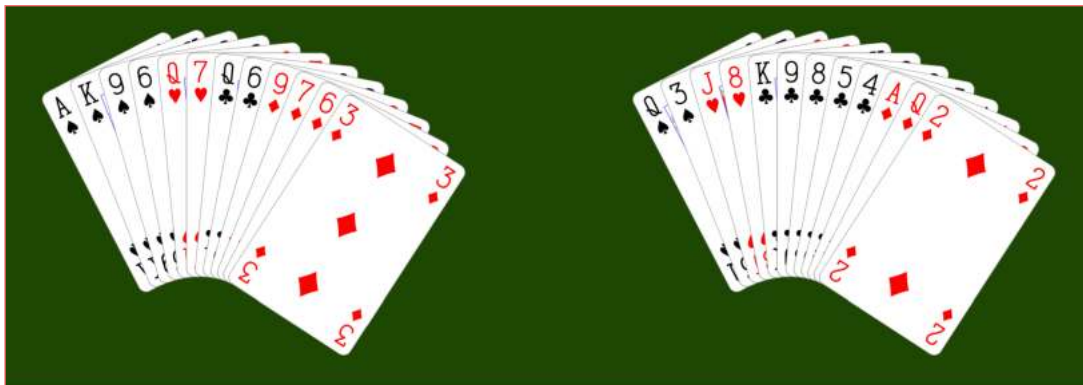
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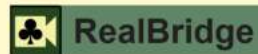
1



W	N	E	S
2NT	1♥	2♣	P



West and East each dropped a card.
Can you find the missing cards?



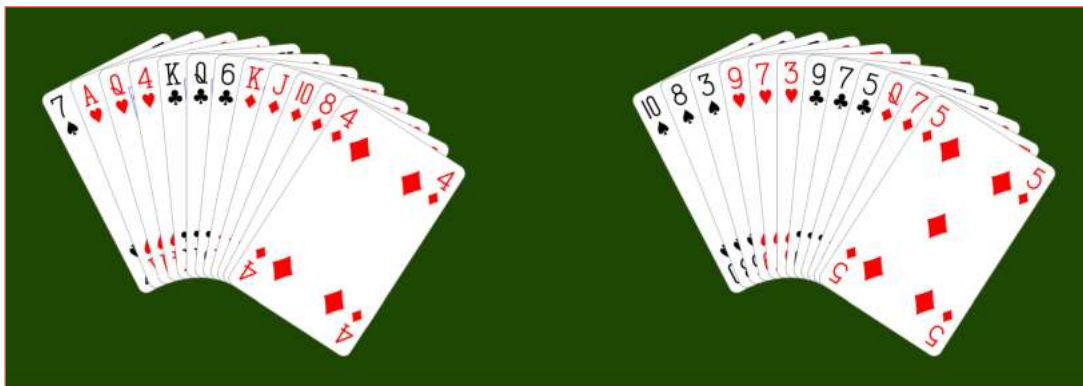
ANSWER

1 West's 2NT bid shows enough points to go to game opposite an opening hand. The general rule of thumb for responding no trumps to partner's overcall is to bid one level lower than facing an opening hand. West needs more points so must add the ♥K.

East requires good clubs to overcall at the two level, but already has sufficient points (around 10+). East must add the ♣J. Two-level overcalls in a minor are almost always 6-card suits, with at least two honours.

Question 2 overleaf

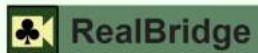
2



W	N	E	S
1♦	P	1♠	P
2♣			



West and East each dropped a card.
Can you find the missing cards?



ANSWER

2 West needs to add the ♣3. West opened 1♦. With the ♥K their rebid would have been 2♥ – a reverse showing 16+ points and 5-4 shape. Adding the ♣A would have made West strong enough to rebid 3♣ – a game force.

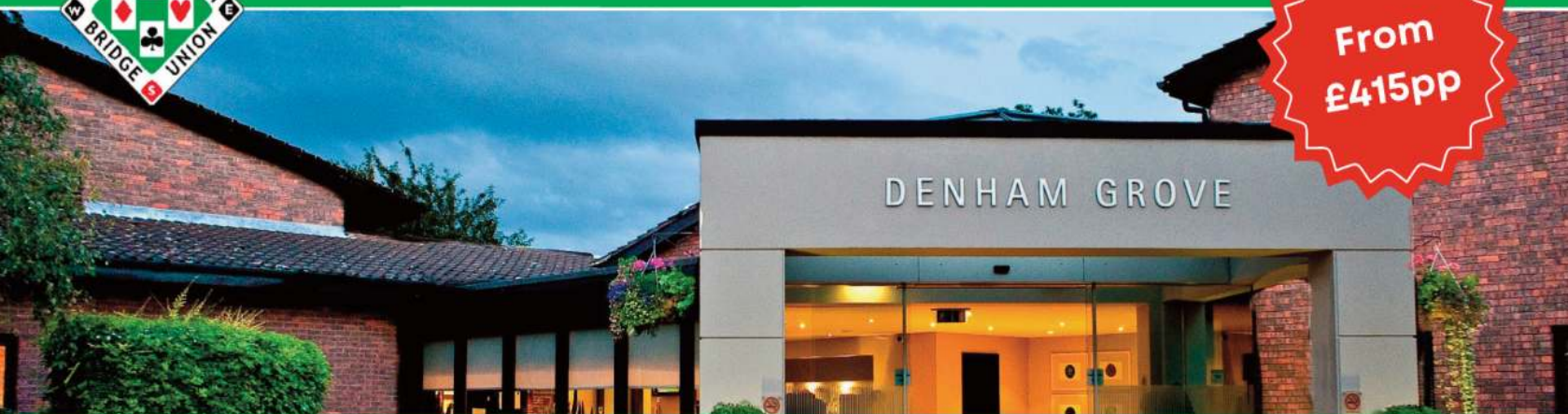
East must have a fourth spade to respond 1♠, and 6+ points, so East must add the ♠A.

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Finding a fit straight away is a great feeling and while there are some simple guidelines on supporting, there are also some exceptions. Let's start with what we mean by support. It mainly refers to bidding the same suit that your partner bid which might be straight away if partner opened. Immediate support shows four cards in the same suit.

W	N	E	S
1♥	Pass	2♥	Pass
?			

Here 2♥ shows four hearts and 6-9 points. If the suit bid is a minor, like here, then the support bid also denies holding any 4-card major suit.

W	N	E	S
1♦	Pass	2♦	Pass
?			

Sometimes you will support partner with just three cards in their suit. This is when their bid shows a longer suit which could be for a number of reasons:

- ♣ they have overcalled, so must have at least a 5-card suit;

- ♣ they opened and have bid twice, either bidding two suits or the same suit twice. To support the first suit or a twice-bid suit you only need three cards.
- ♣ they began with a pre-emptive bid, at the two level or higher, showing a suit of six, seven or more cards. You will support with three cards, a good two or even one with a little bridge judgement!

We usually refer to support as relating to suit bids but what if partner opens 1NT and you bid 6NT. You have agreed a contract but not a suit. Support in this case is 'quantitative' showing that responder has 21 points and can be reasonably certain of a small slam.

Beginning Bridge book one has most of these situations and *Continuing Bridge book two* considers situations when judgment calls for 3-card support or when to support to compete against an opposition contract. Try the questions overleaf to check your knowledge.

Quiz overleaf



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What would you bid with the following hands, sitting in the seat shown?

1

W	N	E	S
1♦	Pass	?	

East – Love All	
♠	10 8 2
♥	K 9 4
♦	A 7 3 2
♣	9 6 3

2

W	N	E	S
1♣	1♥	Pass	?

South – Love All	
♠	10 9 6
♥	Q 8 4
♦	K J 10 6 5
♣	Q 6

3

W	N	E	S
3♣	Dble	?	

East – Game All	
♠	10
♥	5 3 2
♦	K 8 7 6 3
♣	A J 4 2

4

W	N	E	S
1♠	Dble	?	

East - N/S Vul	
♠	K 9 4 2
♥	8 6 5 2
♦	3
♣	9 6 3 2

5

W	N	E	S
1♠	Pass	?	

East – Game All	
♠	K 9 4
♥	2
♦	8 6 4 3
♣	A 8 7 3 2

6

W	N	E	S
1NT	Pass	?	

East - N/S Vul	
♠	A K J
♥	A K 6
♦	J 10 5
♣	A Q 4 2

ANSWERS

Hand 1–2♦. You can support your partner's diamond suit with four cards. This shows 6-9 points and crucially denies a 4-card major.

Hand 2–2♥. You can support with three cards as partner has made an overcall showing at least five hearts. Don't bid 2♦, as your hearts are a known major fit.

Hand 3 – 5♣. You expect this to be a sacrifice. The opponents may well have a game and everyone is vulnerable. Raising partner with this expected 11-card fit can pay off. If the contract fails, down two (and possibly doubled), it is a good result compared to a major-suit game making their way.

Hand 4 – 3♠. Without the double you would raise to 2♠ but the opponents' intervention changes everything. Now you raise pre-emptively to make it difficult for them to find their fit.

Hand 5 – 2♠. Did we say you need four cards to support?! Sometimes it is right to support with three. Around 75% of the time, partner will hold five spades. You have 3-card support and a ruffing value with your singleton.

Hand 6 – 6NT. While not technically a fit (as there is no suit) you have agreed your contract. Support here is a quantitative raise. With 22 points you have enough for the small slam opposite partner's 12-14 points. ☐



Do we need different bidding systems? Is one system better than another? Does a particular system suit one partnership more than another? Does a player's judgement contribute more to their success than any particular bidding system?

In a nutshell: The best bidding system is one you and partner both know and understand, and which provides the best tools to cope with bidding problems as they arise.

DIFFERENT PEOPLE LIKE DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF SYSTEMS

Some might choose a system because it is: aggressive, natural or artificial, modern or old style, or with lots of pre-empts and light openings, or focused on constructive bidding. But mainly they want the one that will let them win!

As bidding is dynamic, and changes happen, it's good to know what's evolving in the 'big' world of bridge, rather than be left behind, regardless of which style we prefer.

When a new player starts bridge, the system they learn is their security blanket. They don't need anything else. It's hard enough to manage all the bids in one's own system, let alone comprehend that other people could do things differently! As you meet different players – on cruise ships or bridge holidays, or playing in bigger tournaments – you will hear of other systems.

My Online School of Bridge is written using Standard American, the most popular system in the world. The most recent additions to its many courses are a couple to compare systems: *Acol vs Standard* (four card suits vs five card majors), and coming soon will be *Acol to Two Over One Game Force*.

I've highlighted similarities as much as differences to avoid the natural fear reaction about learning a new system. My audience consists mainly of newer players. Because of the LMS (Learning Management System – software to deliver, track and manage e-learning) used by the Online School of Bridge, I've created hands to play

and review in both systems. Members do it themselves at home and play hands over and over again, guided by hints and videos.



Each system has its strengths and weaknesses, and within each system there are so many variations around the world ... *Acol*, which is taught in the UK, New Zealand and parts of Australia and Europe, has different approaches to opening. Some always open a four card major, when the hand is 4·3·4·2, and others will open the 'lower of two fours' with a hand like this:

♠KJ104 ♥864 ♦AQ107 ♣AJ

Playing *Acol*, I would open 1♠, but many are taught to open the 'lower of two fours' and would open 1♦.

Continued overleaf

People might say that *Standard American* is easier because you know the suit is at least five cards, but there's a strategic advantage to opening 1♥ or 1♠ and responding with 2♥ or 2♠ with four card openings to reach the two level quickly.

The Acol weak no trump (12 – 14) has a lot going for it too. The preemptive value is powerful, and opponents have a hard time bidding over it unless they're using something like Landy.

But then we could say that Acol would advocate opening 1NT on an awful 12 count which *Standard American* players might judge to pass, such as:

♠QJ10 ♥Q864 ♦QJ3 ♣KJ7.

With either the weak or the strong no trump openings, all systems are beautifully clear with responding, and it's just a matter of knowing you need a few extra points to show the same balanced or unbalanced shapes when playing the weaker no trump.

Bridge is best taught on a Spiral Curriculum, with only a small portion of a



topic examined at first, with a view to expanding it when revisiting it later. Students retain their enthusiasm for a subject and are eager to learn more.

ANSWERING THE ORIGINAL QUESTIONS

Do we need different bidding systems?

Not really, but it's advantageous to know what an opponent means. And some people just love learning new things.

Is one system better than another?

A favourite system will suit the personality of the partnership, and provided it's

sufficiently modern for aggressive opponents, then no, one popular system is not better than another. How you and partner understand each other, and what you can expect from partner's bids, is more important than which system.

Does a particular system suit one partnership more than another?

Yes definitely! Partnerships want a system that suits their bridge 'style'. Aggressive players want to be able to experiment and bid a lot. Conservative people want to stick to the rules of their more rigid system.

Does a player's judgement contribute more to their success than any particular bidding system?

Yes, no bidding system can make up for a lack of judgement. Whether you open, and what you open, relies on judgement and a sense of timing. Responding and intervening does too. Developing judgement (and executing it) is the ultimate for a bridge player regardless of which system they play. □

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While Harold Vanderbilt can be credited with inventing **contract** bridge a hundred years ago, it was hardly in a vacuum. The bridge that had been played before then was *auktion* and *plafond*. Both were so popular that between 1910 and 1912 'bridge mania' swept the country, with numerous newspaper articles warning against the evils of the game. The primary difference between auction/plafond bridge and the modern contract bridge was the scoring system. Harold Vanderbilt wrote, 'contract bridge incorporated a number of new and exciting features; premiums for slams bid and made, vulnerability, and the decimal system of scoring which by increasing both trick and game values and all premiums and penalties was destined to add enormously to the popularity of contract bridge.'

Bridge had been played widely in this country from about 1907, (even in 1903 the *Daily Mirror* devoted a whole page to it),

particularly in working men's clubs, and by 1912 a 'bridge mania' was the subject of extensive newspaper commentary. One widely circulated article by Frank Danby (real name Julia Frankau), a prolific popular author, provided a scathing account of women 'infected' with bridge mania which led to the ruin of young wives and mothers in society.

*'Husbands, homes, and children are neglected, so irresistible is the fascination of these clubs. It is as futile to argue with a club maniac as with an opium eater or an inebriate.'*¹

During World War I, the press was equally unsympathetic to the game, and this attitude hardly improved following the end of the conflict.

*'The women's clubs and bridge clubs still shelter many women slackers, and women who have dabbled in various forms of war work and then settled down to doing nothing at all.'*²

Although many clubs were in existence before the First World War, they multiplied enormously during the conflict. The game of bridge then was associated directly with money and excitement – in other words, gambling.

Indeed, by 1919 some London clubs were playing auction bridge for £10 a 100. Two pounds a 100 was considered a slow game and £3 and £5 was far more usual.

The bridge clubs that were formed in towns and villages replicated much of the competitive bridge world today, with men's clubs, women's clubs and mixed clubs. It was the women's clubs that attracted the most vitriol by journalists:

'Too much card-playing has a very bad effect on the nerves of women.'

'They become over-strung and irritable. Some of them never stop smoking. The tension is worst where the play is high and

Continued overleaf

¹ Bridge and Bridge Clubs, Pearsons Magazine January 1913

² Weekly Dispatch London, 7 October 1917

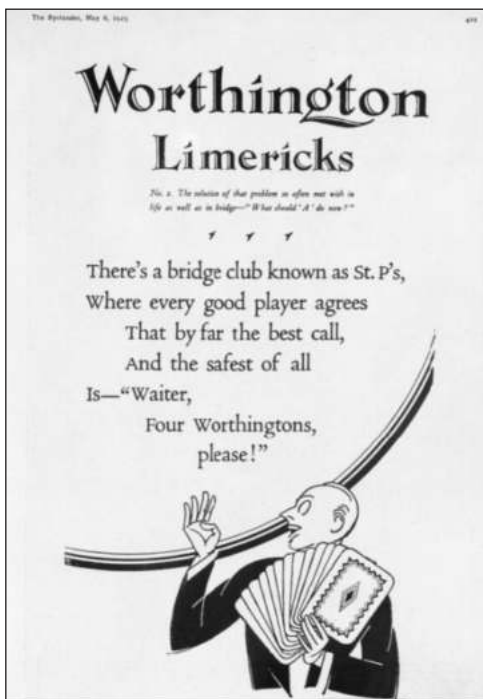
³ AE Manning Foster, Daily Mirror 27 August 1919

*where they are playing for sums which they cannot afford to lose.'*³

An armistice may have been declared between the warring countries, but women were clearly not the beneficiaries of the peace.

*'The worst side of human nature is to be found in some women's bridge clubs or mixed clubs, where cards are played. The connection between bridge and scandal is not apparent on the surface. But the fact remains that between the intervals of play gossip and scandal are rife. Every member is ruthlessly dissected. The wildest and most improbable stories are circulated on the flimsiest of evidence. No one's reputation is secure from the bridge club scandalmonger.'*⁴

In the years that followed, bridge boomed. By 1925, the year of this advertisement for Worthington, which appeared in both local and national papers,



The Bystander, 06/05/1925. The text below Worthington Limericks reads: 'No. 2. The solution of that problem so often met with in life as well as in bridge – "What should 'A' do now?"'

bridge was played in residential clubs, at the seaside, in hotels (including one in St Leonards-on-Sea, which promoted itself as a hotel for 'motorists of moderate means') and at St David's Cardiff Catholic Cathedral, where details were available from the Presbytery.

In Lincoln, progress in opening a bridge club was more sedate, and in September 1925 the *Lincoln Leader*, under a headline 'Proposed Bridge Club for Lincoln' reported:

'It has been suggested to us that the time is ripe for the formation of a bridge club in Lincoln. There are undoubtedly today a good many fine bridge players in the city, and a club, if formed under proper conditions, should be more than successful. If bridge players willing to join such a club would intimate the same to the Editor of the 'Leader', we would take the necessary steps to convene a meeting and ascertain

Continued overleaf

⁴ Derby Daily Telegraph, 31/08/1920

what could be done in the matter?

Some bridge club committees today appear to work at the same speed.

While auction bridge was attracting devout Catholics, motorists of moderate means, and beer drinkers along with the odd earl and viscount – these groups were not mutually exclusive. *The Sheffield Daily Telegraph* in November 1925 reported that Monte Carlo was to have a bridge club which was being opened by a colonel in the British Army. It was touted as an alternative attraction to the casino and among its first members were a royal duke, three earls and a viscount. How many duplicate clubs today can boast such diversity?

What led to this bridge boom? The *Kensington News* explained in the same month that:

'Everything points to a boom in Auction

Bridge, for we cannot recall any card game which has reached and maintained such popularity as bridge. One meets it in almost every household, and at both afternoon and evening parties, it has now usurped the place of chief attraction. Bridge clubs have also been, and are still being formed, to meet its ever increasing demands....the reason for this popularity is no doubt to be found in its constant variations, for no matter how long or how often one plays it, no two games are ever alike. There is also the ever-present element of risk and venture which no doubt appeals to the sporting spirit in most of us, and so long as the game is not hampered with too many conventions, it will, we feel confident, retain the position of being the most popular card game in the world.'

AE Manning Foster, writing in *The*

Bystander in April 1925, explained that at many 'Cock and Hen' bridge clubs it was customary to have certain afternoons and evenings for playing Partnership. This consisted of having to remain with one partner in the bonds of 'Bridgelock' for the whole of the sittings. He continued:

'One of the pleasures of the game is its diversity, and you lose the charm of variety when you are chained to one partner all the time ... it is not easy to bear the play of one to whom you are yoked for the entire evening.'

Maybe he wanted desperately to play with a royal duke ...

By contrast, after contract bridge had widely displaced auction, it was best **not** played at clubs or on ocean liners as reported in the *Beds and Herts Pictorial* in September 1932:

Continued overleaf

'According to a well-known expert at the game, the percentage of really good women contract bridge players is less than five in a hundred, but most of them, he says, consider that they are masters and cannot lose. Such conceit leads all too often to direful results. Women go on playing, whatever their losses, rather than suffer the indignity of admitting that others are better players. All this is disquieting, particularly as bridge clubs are becoming more numerous, not only in towns, but in the suburbs. As an occasional recreation in the home or in friendly circles a game of bridge makes a pleasant break: it is also an easy way of entertaining. But moderation should be the keynote in this as in every other direction. Clubs are surely best ruled out, and card games should never be played with strangers in hotels, trains or on ocean liners.'

This was before online bridge came to the home counties! ☐

A promotional poster for the 2025 EBU Summer Meeting. The background is a photograph of a pebbly beach in Eastbourne, with the sea and a pier in the distance. In the foreground, a red plastic card holder sits on the pebbles, containing several bridge-related cards, including a Swiss Pairs Championship card and a card with 'XX PASS' and 'X'. The text is overlaid on the image in white boxes.

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The logo of The English Bridge Union, featuring a diamond shape with a green and white pattern and the text 'THE ENGLISH BRIDGE UNION' around it.

When I took over from my predecessor, Mark Humphris, as CEO of EBED, he went above and beyond to ensure a smooth transition. The baton was officially passed at the EBED Summer Camp in 2024. However, he made one small error when introducing me – stating that it was my first summer camp. I had to correct him: it was actually my tenth! If we count the Autumn and Spring camps, it was my sixteenth. EBED is looking to build on the good work of Rowena White in Yorkshire, and is hoping to establish the Yorkshire Schools Cup in the north of the country in January, as well as looking to establish bridge in three schools in the Hull area.

My journey with junior bridge began in 1997 when I found myself teaching a group of enthusiastic young players alongside Alison Nicolson and Abbey Smith at the Summer Camp at Marlborough College. Fast forward to 2024, and we are all still deeply involved – delivering a taster session to 14 tables at Hereford Cathedral School with Abbey and leading an inspiring day with Alison and a team of sixteen



volunteers at Pittville School, Cheltenham, where we introduced bridge to all 170 Year 8 pupils. Alison, Jan Bailey, Alan Stanfield and others are doing excellent work in Gloucestershire. Their next endeavour: a taster session for 300 pupils at Cleeve School in Cheltenham over two days in July.

By every measure, the number of young people playing bridge is rising. This growth is thanks to many dedicated individuals, but one standout contributor is Joan Bennett. She tirelessly uses her contacts to telephone, email and cajole teachers, parents and young people to attend events.

I have been focussing on the counties in the area around the Spring Camp in South

Shropshire. Joan told me about a contact she knows in Shrewsbury School. I paid a visit to the school leading to a promise of a bridge club to start in September. While I was there, I handed out flyers for the camp to various clubs using our 'Gather your Grandchild!' slogan.

At Bristol University, Thibault Crosnier, a member of the England U21 squad has a small club of four students. Charlie Bucknell and I held a successful free beer, free pizza, bridge taster session to entice more university students into the club. The



real work with universities starts at freshers' fairs later this year with similar taster sessions planned.

I was delighted to find out that the sixth form college in Hereford has a bridge club

Continued overleaf

with six tables. I immediately offered them bidding boxes and boards, as well as one of my county team to assist with the teaching. Based on a contact Hereford gave me, there will be a bridge club starting at Worcester Sixth Form College in July. I suspect that every sixth form college lends itself to having a bridge club; there is a project here for September to establish as many as possible of these organisations.

NUMBERS AT FACE-TO-FACE EVENTS ARE ON THE UP

At the Surrey Schools Cup in February, 150 young players participated, and almost as many attended the National Schools Day, held at Loughborough Grammar School in March.

ONLINE EVENTS ARE THRIVING

EBED's online initiatives continue to expand. The Grand Prix, which consists of six sessions (three online and three at our camps), saw nine and a half tables for round two. Meanwhile, the Generation Game, held monthly on Sundays, attracted 11 tables. New faces are appearing at the week

Thursday afternoon RealBridge sessions. The Schools League is another thriving online competition.

LEADING FROM THE TOP

It is inspiring to see two of the country's top players, Tom Townsend and Chris Jagger, actively supporting the next generation. Tom is running junior sessions at the Young Chelsea Bridge Club. There are junior sections at Oxford and Cheltenham Bridge Clubs too. Chris is coaching students at the Purse School in Cambridgeshire. Alan Shillitoe, in addition to the excellent and longstanding work he continues to do for the England U16 team, is teaching bridge in a Primary School in Cambridgeshire. Pamela Booth-Jones (Chair of Staffs & Shrops) and Richard Jephcott (Vice-Chair of Worcestershire) are personally volunteering to introduce bridge in schools within their respective counties.

A WAVE OF SUCCESS STORIES

Across the country, passionate individuals are driving bridge's resurgence among young players:

- ❖ Douglas Wright and his team have successfully launched several bridge clubs in Sussex and Surrey schools—and they're planning more!
- ❖ Stuart Haring (Haberdashers' Aske's), Duncan Happer (Loughborough Grammar School), and Sue Johnson (London) are consistently nurturing new talent.
- ❖ Dina Bennett, a Year 11 student and England U21 squad member, has started an incredible bridge club at Henrietta Barnett School with no less than 11 tables!
- ❖ Kian Tan, a former Singapore U25 international and current librarian at the London Academy of Excellence, has established a thriving club.
- ❖ Stuart King has introduced bridge to all the Year 10 students at Queen Elizabeth Hospital School in Bristol. By the end of the year, all of Years 8 and 9 will have had an introduction too. That amounts to 170 pupils.


THE FUTURE IS BRIGHT

The momentum is undeniable—bridge is experiencing a renaissance among young

Continued overleaf







players! Over 700 young people have had a taste of bridge since September. With passionate volunteers, dedicated teachers, and enthusiastic students, the game's future has never looked brighter. If you've ever considered getting involved, now is the time. Join the movement and be part of the exciting next chapter in bridge's story. If you know of any young people that would like to learn, do get in touch with me: they can join the online Thursday Afternoon Bridge Club as complete beginners at any time or attend one of our three camps. If you are already involved in teaching young people to play bridge, I would be delighted to hear from you.

Richard Croot
*CEO English Bridge Education
and Development*



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I sometimes wish I hadn't started playing bridge. When I was approaching pensionable age I was, like many before me, looking forward to doing little but pottering around the garden, watching *Sky Sports* and counting my money. The world cruise was out there somewhere in the ether towards the end of phase two.

One of my sons found out about my 'plans' and bought me a book entitled something like 'Effective Retirement'. The worm had turned. Rather than me continually going on at my offspring as to how they would utilise their (very) expensive education, I had to provide the plans. I managed to while away the first three months demolishing the old shed, spending hours meticulously separating rusty nails from rotting wood and making a lifelong friend in next door's cat. When the last day of the Ashes at the Oval coincided with the final dump run, having now successfully saved the planet, I had no option but to look at the book which fell open at the chapter entitled, 'Stimulate you Mind'. It suggested restarting some mental activity which you had enjoyed but had curtailed due to work or family pressures.

So I joined a local bridge club and from

there bridge has taken over my life. It is stimulating, flexes your memory and is addictive so be warned – very few people



stop playing so once you start you are in it for life – some say it should carry a government health warning. Others want the government to promote it as it 'adds life to your years' rather than just adding years to your life. It provides regular social interaction in a challenging but fun environment.

Bridge is a partnership game. You compete as a pair so you need to build up a common understanding (of both bidding

and play) and that is part of the challenge.

Many bridge clubs now run friendly beginner and 'assisted play' sessions to help new players learn at a pace that suits.

It is not necessary to attend as a pair – players can be paired up and may change partners each week. Eventually you will find someone with whom to form a regular partnership. Playing bridge opens a whole new world of activity from weekly club sessions to 'cafe bridge' days in local towns and holidays both in the UK and abroad.

Playing with different partners five times a week, assisting with various training sessions and going on bridge breaks has now kidnapped my 'retirement'.

You can suggest to non-playing friends that they google 'Learn to Play Bridge in five Minutes' – a YouTube video with Peter Hollands. The English Bridge Union (EBU) to which most (but not all) bridge clubs are affiliated can help if you need to find a local club or teacher via its website:

<https://tinyurl.com/ebuclubteacher>

If you are in or near the Croydon/Purley area and would like to know more about the local clubs please feel free to email me at: Chris.briggs3101@gmail.com □



Getting the experts in to learn from their brilliance can be a great way to improve your bridge. Richmond Bridge Club recently hosted Zia Mahmood who is wonderfully entertaining and equally instructive.

There were 14 tables of club members and visitors. Zia had selected 16 boards, many from his playing career. Eight pairs got to play against Zia, and four individuals, drawn at random, got to partner him for four boards. (The advice the players were given as they arrived was 'Sit E/W if you want to play against Zia; sit N/S if you want a chance to play with him!')

Zia talked through the boards after they were played, and entertained us with stories from his life in bridge. Some of the deals were educational, requiring classic thought and planning, and some were more exotic.

Here is a deal from the former category:

Love All. Dealer South			
♠	9 7 5 3	♠	2
♥	Q J 6 3	♥	9 5
♦	K Q 2	♦	J 10 8 7 4
♣	A K	♣	J 10 8 7 5
♠	A Q J 10 6		
♥	K 10 7 4		
♦	9 3		
♣	9 3		
	♠ K 8 4		
	♥ A 8 2		
	♦ A 6 5		
	♣ Q 6 4 2		

You are sitting South. If you open a 12-14 no trump, West will come in with a Landy 2♣, showing the majors. Playing a strong no trump you would open 1♣ and West would overcall 1♠. Either way you get to play in 3NT. West leads the ♠Q.

You win trick one with the ♠K and count your winners. There are eight tricks on top, so it seems that you will need the heart finesse for your ninth. *When you have a plan, see if you can think of a better one!* The bidding has made it unlikely that the heart finesse will succeed, but what about cashing three tricks in each minor, discovering West's initial 5-4-2-2 distribution, and then exiting with a spade? West is welcome to four spade tricks, but then has to lead away from the ♥K. Contract made! Give it a go by clicking in the centre of the hand diagram.


Every club should think about inviting an expert in now and again. This one was hosted on a Saturday, with lunch in the middle to keep the energy levels up! It was great fun and congratulations to the organisation team led by Jonathan Hird and Titch Glenday. □



click
link

Here, we are concerned with keeping control of the hand in a trump contract. You may care to take the wheel in our first offering where a competitive auction has forced you into 4♥.

Hand 1
South plays in 4♥.
West leads the ♠4.
East wins with the ♠K and leads the ♠A.

♠	J 8 2
♥	10 4 3
♦	10 9 8 4
♣	A K 2
	
♠	6
♥	A K 7 5 2
♦	K Q J 7 6
♣	8 5

W	N	E	S
2♣	3♥	1♠	2♥
All Pass		3♠	4♥

The bidding? Well, East opened 1♠, you overcalled 2♥, West competed with 2♠ and North dutifully supported your suit with 3♥. When East tried their luck with 3♠ you decided to take a shot at 4♥, not knowing if

that might push them into a makeable 4♠. As it happens, the opposition decided to let it rest, leaving West to lead a low spade. East takes that to play another top spade and it's up to you.

Your preliminary *Count and Plan* reveals four slow diamond winners and two top clubs and, if trumps break 3-2, four hearts as well. That's ten tricks, so all looks well. A count of losers shows one heart (at least), one spade and one diamond, so if trumps are 4-1 you are going off.

Since you aren't doubled in 4♥, you can probably rely on a 3-2 trump break; with that in mind you can cash two top trumps and then turn your attention to diamonds.

East takes the ♦A and plays a third spade but you can ruff and continue with winners, allowing the defence to take the master trump at their leisure. Here's the full deal:

Hand 1. 4♥ by South. West leads the ♠4			
♠ J 8 2			
♥ 10 4 3			
♦ 10 9 8 4			
♣ A K 2			
♠ Q 9 4	Click here to play hand Press 'Play' to have a go Press 'Next' to see Paul play it	♠ A K 10 7 5 3	
♥ Q J 8		♥ 9 6	
♦ 5 3 2		♦ A	
♣ Q 10 9 3		♣ J 7 6 4	
♠ 6			
♥ A K 7 5 2			
♦ K Q J 7 6			
♣ 8 5			

Many players make the mistake of playing one too many rounds of trumps in this type of position, knocking out the master trump. It is rarely right to do so; here it would be fatal. A third round of spades would dislodge your last heart and then the opponents would be able to run off all their spades when in with the ♦A.

Continued overleaf

A more subtle example of keeping control is shown in the next example. East opens 1NT, you make a penalty double as South and West runs to 2♦. You try 2♠ when that comes round to you, but East is not giving up that easily. Knowing of a 9-card diamond fit between their partnership, East competes to 3♦. Irritated, you advance to 3♠, hoping to find something useful in the dummy.

W	N	E	S
		1NT	Dble
2♦	Pass	Pass	2♠
Pass	Pass	3♦	3♠
All Pass			

Well, the ♥Q is useful, I suppose, but the ♣Q and ♦J are so much waste paper. Right, where do you go from here?

Your initial **Count and Plan** reveals six spades, two slow hearts and one club for a total of nine tricks. This is an easy hand – what’s the problem?. East takes the ♦A and plays another diamond. Can you see you may have trouble if trumps break 4-1?

Let’s say you ruff the second diamond and play four rounds of trumps (or only two rounds, for that matter, if they break badly). Now you set about hearts to set up two slow winners, but repeated diamond forces from the defenders reduce your trump suit to rubble. Essentially, you lose control as you can’t afford to ruff three diamonds in hand. Here’s the full deal:

Hand 2
South plays in 3♠.
West leads the ♦4.

♠ 9 2
♥ Q 3
♦ J 10 5
♣ Q 8 7 6 4 2

♠ A K Q J 6 3
♥ J 10 9 4
♦ 8
♣ A 10

Hand 1. 3♠ by South. West leads the ♦4			
♠ 9 2		♠ 10 8 7 4	
♥ Q 3		♥ A 7 5	
♦ J 10 5		♦ A K 6 2	
♣ Q 8 7 6 4 2		♣ K 3	
♠ 5	Click here to play hand		
♥ K 8 6 2	Press 'Play' to have a go		
♦ Q 9 7 4 3	Press 'Next' to see Paul play it		
♣ J 9 5			
♠ A K Q J 6 3			
♥ J 10 9 4			
♦ 8			
♣ A 10			

The solution is to ruff the second trick, play off one top trump and, leaving a spade on the table, play on your side suit. East may take the ♥A and lead another diamond but you can ruff and play another heart. West can take the king but is now powerless to do anything. Another diamond lead would be futile as dummy has a spade remaining to ruff it, leaving your spade holding intact.


Your nine tricks (six spades, two hearts and the ♣A) remain to be taken at your pleasure.

Continued overleaf

Q1 How might you play 2♠ after the following transfer auction?

W	N	E	S
Pass	2♥ ^A	Pass	1NT
All Pass			2♠

Hand 1
South plays in 2♠.
West leads the ♥J.

♠ K 8 5 3 2
♥ Q 4
♦ Q J 7 5 2
♣ 8

♠ Q 7
♥ 8 6 3
♦ A K 3
♣ A 9 6 4 2

Preliminary analysis. This is an awkward hand. 2♦ is obviously a better contract than 2♠ but it's impossible to arrange to play there. Anyway, the defenders play three

rounds of hearts, forcing you to ruff in dummy and weakening dummy's trumps. You try a spade to the ♠Q and West's ♠A. That defender now tries the ♣Q. What is your plan?

ANSWER

This type of hand is not so easy when it comes to making an initial **Count and Plan**. However, you can see that you have no losers in diamonds and clubs, so need to hold yourself to three spade losers and two heart losers.

Here, after four tricks, if you were to take the ♣A to play off the ♠K and another spade, you'd be in trouble on a 4-2 trump break. On the layout below, West would seize the chance to draw dummy's remaining trumps and cash a lot of winners in hearts and clubs. The correct way to deal with the hand is to win the ♠A at trick five, cash the ♠K at trick six and then simply to ignore the outstanding high trumps. You should play off diamond winners, forcing out the master trumps that way. Sure, if

trumps had been 3-3 then you would lose two trump tricks instead of just one, but you would still make the contract. The loss of a potential overtrick can be bravely borne.

Your eight tricks come from four spades (in a curious fashion), just three diamonds (two of them get trumped) and a club. It may be easier to see that the losers are confined to three spades and two hearts. Here's the full deal:

Hand 1. 3♠ by South. West leads the ♦4			
♠ K 8 5 3 2		♠ J 4	
♥ Q 4		♥ A K 7 5	
♦ Q J 7 5 2		♦ 10 8 6	
♣ 8		♣ K 10 7 5	
♠ A 10 9 6	Click here to play hand Press 'Play' to have a go Press 'Next' to see Paul play it	♠ Q 7	
♥ J 10 9 2		♥ 8 6 3	
♦ 9 4		♦ A K 3	
♣ Q J 3		♣ A 9 6 4 2	

Continued overleaf

Q2 How might you play in 4♠ after the following auction?

W	N	E	S
4♥	4♠	1♥	1♠
		All Pass	

Hand 2
South plays in 4♠.
West leads the ♥6.

♠ J 4 2
♥ 10 7
♦ A Q 9 6 5 4
♣ K Q

♠ A 9 7 6 3
♥ –
♦ K 10 3
♣ A 8 6 3 2

Preliminary analysis. E/W don't seem to have too much – just eleven hearts and, presumably, some shape. Your *Count and Plan* show that you seem to have plenty of

winners and not too many losers – indeed, the only losers are in the trump suit.

If trumps are 3-2 you can play off the ♠A and another spade, losing just two trump tricks and making an overtrick. Do you have any thoughts about that?

ANSWER

Your obligatory *Count and Plan* shows more than enough winners, it's simply a case of not losing too many trump tricks and control. Having ruffed the heart lead at trick one, you are down to just four trumps.

A 3-2 trump break makes eleven tricks possible, but the contract is 4♠, not 5♠. Careful play makes ten tricks certain (well, except against a highly improbable 5-0 trump split). You should take precautions against a possible bad trump break by cashing the ace of trumps and then turning your attention to diamonds, running off your winners in the suit. The defenders are welcome to take three trump tricks at their pleasure but that is it. It doesn't matter if trumps are 4-1 or 3-2, you can allow E/W to

have three trump winners and nothing else. Here's the full deal:

Hand 2. 4♠ by South. West leads the ♥6			
	♠ J 4 2		
	♥ 10 7		
	♦ A Q 9 6 5 4		
	♣ K Q		
♠ 8		♠ K Q 10 5	
♥ K J 9 6 4 3		♥ A Q 8 5 2	
♦ J 7		♦ 8 2	
♣ 10 7 5 4		♣ J 9	
	♠ A 9 7 6 3		
	♥ –		
	♦ K 10 3		
	♣ A 8 6 3 2		

Now, suppose you did play off the ♠A and another spade. East would draw all your remaining trumps and then the defenders would take all their heart winners. Five down. Oops! ☐

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In each of the following hands, you are sitting South, and will face a situation that commonly goes awry for aspiring players. Imagine that you are playing in a duplicate with matchpoint scoring. You should make a plan to give yourself the best chance of favourable comparisons with other N/S pairs.

Hand 1

♠ J 10 7 3
♥ A Q 4 2
♦ K 6 3
♣ K Q

♠ 9 4
♥ J
♦ A Q J 9 8 5 4
♣ J 7 5

You are in 5♦.
West leads the ♥5.
Plan your play.

Hand 2

♠ Q J 10 9
♥ 8 7 5 4
♦ 7 6 4
♣ Q J

♠ 5
♥ A K J 6 3
♦ J 9 2
♣ K 10 7 2

You are in 3♥, after West doubled your vulnerable 1♥ opening, and East bid 2♠ over North's raise to 2♥.
West leads the ♦A then cashes the ♦KQ before switching to the ♠3.
Plan your play.

Hand 3

♠ 10 7 4
♥ A Q 9 4
♦ K J 4 2
♣ A 8

♠ Q J 5
♥ K J 10 3
♦ A 6
♣ K 6 3 2

You are in 3NT.
West leads the ♠6.
Plan your play.

Hand 4


♠ 8
♥ Q 2
♦ Q J 9 7 3 2
♣ A 10 9 3

♠ A J 2
♥ A J
♦ A 10 8 6 5
♣ K Q 6

You are in 6♦.
West leads the ♠10.
Plan your play.

Hand 1

♠ J 10 7 3
♥ A Q 4 2
♦ K 6 3
♣ K Q



♠ 9 4
♥ J
♦ A Q J 9 8 5 4
♣ J 7 5

You are in 5♦.
West leads the ♥5.
Plan your play.

You have reached a precarious 5♦ contract, when others are likely to either play a diamond partscore or 3NT.

To beat the pairs playing a partscore, you will need to make your contract. While 3NT is not certain to make, it is likely that most pairs will be successful since the defenders will need to play precisely and East will need to have the ♥K in order for 3NT to fail, so in practical terms, you probably need to make 5♦ to match the pairs in 3NT.

You have eight top tricks, and can make two extra tricks by force in clubs, and one trick in hearts if West has the ♥K. If you win trick

one with the ♥A, then you will end up losing two spades and one club, so you need to find a way of reducing your spade losers to just one trick. This can only be achieved by making an extra trick in hearts, so you should play low from the dummy at trick one. If East has the ♥K, you may be defeated by two tricks, but when the ♥J wins the trick, you can draw trumps in two rounds then discard the ♠4 on the ♥A. You will still lose one spade and one club trick, but making your contract will allow you to beat any pairs playing a diamond partscore, and to match any pairs making nine tricks in 3NT.

Hand 1. 5♦ by South

♠ J 10 7 3
♥ A Q 4 2
♦ K 6 3
♣ K Q

♠ K 6 5
♥ K 10 7 5 3
♦ 7
♣ 9 6 4 2

[Click here to play hand](#)
[Press 'Play' to have a go](#)
[Press 'Next' to see David play it](#)


♠ A Q 8 2
♥ 9 8 6
♦ 10 2
♣ A 10 8 3

♠ 9 4
♥ J
♦ A Q J 9 8 5 4
♣ J 7 5

Continued overleaf

Hand 2

♠ Q J 10 9
♥ 8 7 5 4
♦ 7 6 4
♣ Q J



♠ 5
♥ A K J 6 3
♦ J 9 2
♣ K 10 7 2

You are in 3♥, after West doubled your vulnerable 1♥ opening, and East bid 2♠ over North's raise to 2♥. West leads the ♦A then cashes the ♦KQ before switching to the ♠3. Plan your play.

You have competed to 3♥, which has five top losers – one spade, three diamonds and one club. If you avoid a heart loser, then your score for the deal will be -100. If your opponents would have made 2♠, then they would have scored 110, so losing 100 will be a favourable comparison. However, if you lose a heart, and fail by two tricks for -200, or if 2♠ was not making, then your comparison will be unfavourable.

After three rounds of diamonds and a spade switch to East's ♠A, East can safely return a spade, which you trump. You now have to decide whether to play ♥AK hoping that ♥Q will drop, or whether to cash the ♥A, and if the ♥Q does not drop, then plan to cross to dummy and try finessing hearts, hoping that East has started with ♥Qxx (If West started with ♥Qxx you will always have a heart loser).

When you cash the ♥A, both opponents play a low heart...

It is worth considering how many tricks you would have made against 2♠. With spades dividing 4-1, you have two spade winners, and you also appear to have two club winners. If you have two heart winners then 2♠ would likely fail, so in order for your decision to make a significant matchpoint difference, you have to assume that 2♠ can be made, and therefore that hearts are splitting 3-1.

You therefore, lead a club towards dummy. East can win the ♣A, but you win any return, and cross to the ♣Q. You now lead a heart and when East plays the ♥10, you play the ♥J. When West discards, your contract fails by one trick, but -100 will be better than the -110 conceded by any N/S pairs that defended a 2♠ contract.

Hand 2. 3♥ by South

♠ Q J 10 9
♥ 8 7 5 4
♦ 7 6 4
♣ Q J

♠ K 7 6 3
♥ 2
♦ A K Q 8
♣ 9 8 6 5

♠ A 8 4 2
♥ Q 10 9
♦ 10 5 3
♣ A 4 3

♠ 5
♥ A K J 6 3
♦ J 9 2
♣ K 10 7 2

Click here to play hand
Press 'Play' to have a go
Press 'Next' to see David play it

Continued overleaf

Hand 3

♠ 10 7 4
♥ A Q 9 4
♦ K J 4 2
♣ A 8



♠ Q J 5
♥ K J 10 3
♦ A 6
♣ K 6 3 2

You are in 3NT.
West leads the ♠6.
Plan your play.

Though you are playing in 3NT, it is quite likely that some other pairs will be playing in 4♥, so simply making your contract may not result in favourable comparisons. If 4♥ is making, then you will need to win at least 10 tricks to achieve a better score.

The play to the first trick suggests that West has ♠AK, and that East has at most two spades (With ♠AK86, West is more likely to lead the ♠A, so ♠6 is more consistent with ♠AK863, ♠AK862 or ♠AK8632). If West does have five spades, then the defenders can take the first three tricks against a 4♥ contract. However, declarer will then be able to draw two rounds of trumps, and will almost certainly be able to trump two diamonds in hand and two clubs in dummy to make the 4♥ contract.

If we assume that will be the

most likely outcome, then your target in 3N should be to win 10 tricks. Following the play to trick one, you have one spade, four hearts, two diamonds and two clubs. If you simply win those nine tricks, then you will be outscored by the pairs making 4♥, so you should look for a tenth trick. The best chance of achieving this is to win a trick with the ♦J. You can first cash four rounds of hearts, but you should then play the ♦A followed by ♦6 towards dummy. When West plays low, you try the ♦J. If East has the ♦Q, your contract will be defeated if spades were 5-2, but if you do not risk the finesse, you will not score as well as the pairs making 4♥. When ♦J wins the trick, you play your remaining winners, thereby beating any pairs that made 10 tricks in 4♥.

Hand 3. 3NT by South

♠ 10 7 4
♥ A Q 9 4
♦ K J 4 2
♣ A 8

♠ A K 8 6 2
♥ 8 2
♦ Q 9 5 3
♣ Q 4

[Click here to play hand](#)
Press 'Play' to have a go
Press 'Next' to see David play it


♠ 9 3
♥ 7 6 5
♦ 10 8 7
♣ J 10 9 7 5

♠ Q J 5
♥ K J 10 3
♦ A 6
♣ K 6 3 2

Continued overleaf

Hand 4

♠ 8
♥ Q 2
♦ Q J 9 7 3 2
♣ A 10 9 3



♠ A J 2
♥ A J
♦ A 10 8 6 5
♣ K Q 6

You are in 6♦.
West leads the ♠10.
Plan your play.

You have done well to bid to a slam on slender values, but going down in slam is likely to compare poorly with the other N/S pairs, so you should look for the best chance of making your contract.

You have no certain losers, but there is a danger that you will lose a trick to the ♥K and the ♦K. If West has the ♦K4, a diamond loser will be unavoidable, but if East has at least one diamond then you will have to guess whether to finesse or drop. If you lose a diamond trick then you will need to avoid losing a heart trick. You can significantly improve your chances of such an outcome if you lose a diamond trick to West rather than East. Can you see why?

You win trick one with the ♠A, and trump the ♠2. If you now lead a diamond, you cannot guarantee the success of your contract, but trumping another spade would remove that suit as a safe exit suit, so you cross to the ♣K, and trump the ♠J. You can now lead the ♦Q

from the dummy. If East discards, you can win the ♦A then play another diamond, leaving West on lead, either having to lead into the ♥AQ, or to play a second club, thereby ensuring a fourth winner in the suit, or to concede a ruff-and-discard by playing a fourth spade.

When East follows with the ♦4, you should play low from hand. If West wins the ♦K, they will be faced with the same set of unappealing choices described above. Whichever suit West plays will give you a 12th trick, and allow you to make your slam.

On this occasion, West will discard. Avoiding a diamond loser, gives you the option of testing clubs to see if you have four winners in the suit before relying on the heart finesse for an overtrick.

Winning at least 12 tricks will lead to favourable comparisons with every pair that played in game. □

Hand 4. 6♦ by South

♠ 8
♥ Q 2
♦ Q J 9 7 3 2
♣ A 10 9 3

♠ Q 10 9 4
♥ K 8 7 5 3
♦ –
♣ J 8 4 2

♠ K 7 6 5 3
♥ 10 9 6 4
♦ K 4
♣ 7 5

♠ A J 2
♥ A J
♦ A 10 8 6 5
♣ K Q 6

Click here to play hand
Press 'Play' to have a go
Press 'Next' to see David play it

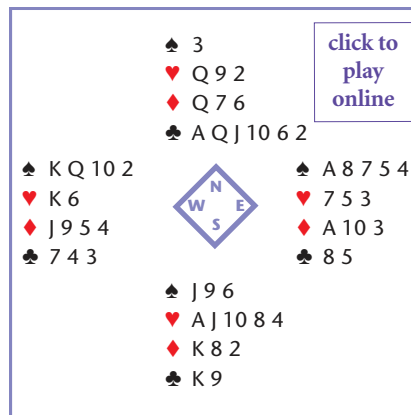


Whenever you defend, information floods in from various sources. The opponents' auction will give you a rough guide to the shape of their hands, also the values held. Partner's opening lead provides information about their hand. Later in the play, you will see signals from your partner and can judge from declarer's early play what their plan may be.

In this article, though, we will note the help available by inspecting the dummy that goes down. With 26 cards then on view, you can often deduce how declarer will tackle the play. You must plan to thwart their efforts.

It's time for our first deal, where you will sit West.

N/S were playing a 15-17 1NT and 5-card majors. This system is popular in many countries and is currently making inroads into the Acol kingdom. How will you plan the defence when your ♠K wins the first trick, partner playing the ♠8?



West	North	East	South
Pass	2♣	Pass	1♥
Pass	4♥	All Pass	2NT ¹
¹ 12-14			

The ♥K will be a second trick. Look at the dummy, though. The chunky club suit suggests that declarer will be hoping for one or more discards there. So, you must defend actively. When no more tricks are available

in the suit that has been led, it is East's duty to give a *suit preference* signal. Here the ♠8 indicated something good in diamonds.

You should switch to the ♦J, letting partner know about this card.

If instead you switch to the ♦4, partner might win with the ♦A and return the suit, placing you with the ♦K.

When you play the ♦J, East must play the ♦3 and declarer wins with the ♦K. They will cross to dummy with a club and run the ♥Q to your king. Another diamond allows partner to score the ♦A and ♦10 and the game is beaten. (The same defence would work if East held ♦K10x and declarer had ♦A8x.)

Continued overleaf

How would you view the defence, as East, when partner leads the ♣Q here:

♠ J 3
♥ 7 4 3 2
♦ A Q 10 9 7
♣ 5 4

♠ Q 7 2
♥ J 6
♦ 8 5 4
♣ Q J 10 3 2

♠ A K 10 9 8 6
♥ A K Q
♦ 2
♣ 9 8 6

♠ 5 4
♥ 10 9 8 5
♦ K J 6 3
♣ A K 7

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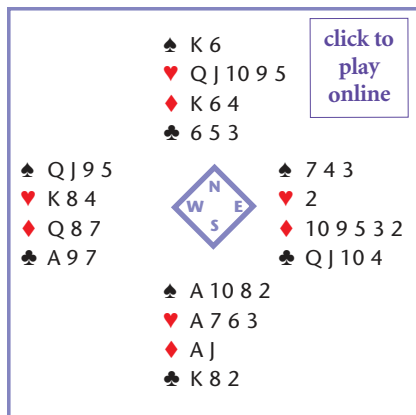
West	North	East	South
Pass	1NT	Pass	1♠
Pass	4♣	All Pass	3♠

Because you hold strong diamonds over the dummy, you are not concerned about declarer taking discards. So, there is no pressing need for a heart switch. What does concern you is dummy's doubleton club and the risk of declarer scoring a club ruff.

You overtake the opening lead with the ♣K and return a trump. When declarer wins with the ♠A and plays another club, you win with the ♣A and return a second trump. Declarer cannot then avoid the loss of three clubs and a trump. South may win the second trump with the king. Whether they then try their luck with three rounds of hearts or the diamond finesse, no rescue will be possible.

Continued overleaf

You are West on the next one. South breaks the transfer holding four trumps, a ruffing value, and several big cards.



West	North	East	South
Pass	2♦ ²	Pass	1NT ¹
Pass	4♥	All Pass	3♥ ³
¹ 15-17, ² transfer to hearts ³ super-accept			

You lead the ♠Q, dummy's king winning, and East produces the ♠3. How do you view the situation when declarer then runs the ♥Q to your king?

There is no pressing need to switch to one of the minors, because your inspection of the dummy tells you that declarer has little hope of a discard. (The full diagram shows that a club or diamond switch would concede a vital extra trick. A spade continuation would run into South's ♠A10.)

You do best to defend passively, returning a trump. Suppose declarer wins in dummy and finesses the ♦J, hoping to set up a discard. The finesse loses, and you return a diamond to the bare ace. Even if declarer does have a discard on the ♦K, they will still have at least two clubs remaining. An eventual lead towards the ♣K fails to deliver the goods and the contract goes one down. A triumph for passive defence!

Continued overleaf


You are still West on this one.

♠ 9 7 5 4

♥ 8 6

♦ K J 7 4

♣ Q J 7



♠ 8 6 3 2

♥ 3

♦ 10 6 2

♣ K 9 8 6 2

♠ –

♥ A Q 10 9 7 5 2

♦ 9 8 5

♣ A 10 3

♠ A K Q J 10

♥ K J 4

♦ A Q 3

♣ 5 4

[click to play online](#)

West	North	East	South
All Pass		4♥	4♠

No, it's not an opening lead problem! You reach for the ♥3 and partner wins with the ace. How will you defend when partner returns the ♥2?

It's well known that a defender should lead a *suit preference* card when delivering a ruff. You can therefore expect East to hold the ♣A. Let's say you return the ♣6 to the partner's ace. What is likely to happen then?

Partner will surely return a third round of hearts, expecting you to be able to ruff higher than dummy's ♠9. No, declarer holds all five higher trumps. After over-ruffing your choice of trump in the dummy, South will draw trumps and discard the remaining club loser on the fourth diamond.

East is not to blame for this disaster in the slightest. West could see in the dummy that they would be over-ruffed after a heart continuation. East could not. West should therefore play king and another club, rather than a spot card, to ensure that the setting tricks are taken. If such a move does not come to mind, West should at least return the ♣2 to indicate that the clubs are headed by an honour.

Continued overleaf

Consider this from East's point of view.

♠ Q J 10 7
♥ K Q J 5
♦ Q 3
♣ 8 4 2

♠ 8 3
♥ 10 9 8 4 2
♦ 7 6 5 2
♣ A 3

♠ A 6 5 4
♥ A 3
♦ A K 8 4
♣ J 6 5

♠ K 9 2
♥ 7 6
♦ J 10 9
♣ K Q 10 9 7

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West	North	East	South
Pass	2♣ ²	Dble ³	1NT ¹
Pass	4♣	All Pass	2♣
¹ 15-17, ² Stayman ³ Lead indicating			

At some tables in a club pairs game, East was half asleep and failed to double the Stayman 2♣ to suggest a good opening lead. West made the natural lead of the ♥10 and declarer ended with twelve tricks (four

trumps, four hearts, three diamonds and a diamond ruff.)

Where East doubled 2♣, the defenders quickly pocketed three tricks in that suit. Declarer won the ♦J switch, drew trumps and claimed ten tricks for the game. What do you make of that?

It was a careless effort by East. When dummy went down, they should have counted 11 points there, plus a minimum of 15 points with the 1NT opener, plus nine points in East's own hand, meant that West could not possibly hold the ♦A or ♦K. At most West might be looking at a totally useless ♣J.

One hope remained – that West would hold the ♠8. East should play a fourth round of clubs, aiming to promote a trump trick in their hand. It mattered not one jot that this would concede a ruff and discard, since declarer had no loser to discard. West would ruff with the ♠8 (a defensive play known as an uppercut). When declarer over-ruffed in dummy, East's ♠K92 would be promoted to provide the setting trick.

Continued overleaf

We end with a deal where you will need to play both the East and West hands, dashing backwards and forwards. OK?

♠ Q 10 6
♥ Q J 9 5
♦ 8 4 3 2
♣ 7 2

[click to
play
online](#)

♠ J 4 2
♥ 8 7 2
♦ K J 9
♣ K 9 8 4

♠ 9 8 5 3
♥ 10 6 4
♦ Q 10 6 5
♣ A 3

♠ A K 7
♥ A K 3
♦ A 7
♣ Q J 10 6 5

West	North	East	South
Pass	3♣ ²	Pass	2NT ¹
Pass	3NT	All Pass	3♦
¹ 20-22, ² Stayman			

Sitting initially in the West seat, you lead the ♣4. The dummy is laid out and you walk

round the table, picking up the East cards and winning with the ♣A. What now?

The players have quitted the first trick. Do you remember which spot-card was led? It was the ♣4 and your inspection of the dummy will have revealed the ♣2 there. The opening lead was therefore from a 4-card suit and declarer has five clubs. Returning the ♣3 is likely to be futile, and you switch to the ♦5.

Quickly back into the West seat, you note declarer's ♦7. What is your plan for the defence? You can win with the ♦9, but you must then return the ♦K to avoid blocking the suit. Declarer wins with the ace, but there are only eight tricks. When South tries to slip through the ♣10, you rise with the ♣K and return the ♦J.

Before you can walk round the table again, your partner resumes the East chair. They overtake with the ♦Q and cash the ♦10 for one down. 'A great combined effort!' partner says. □



Bridge is a difficult game to play perfectly, and as such there are many mantras about bridge that can steer us in the right direction. Some popular mantras include:

Always lead partner's suit.

Third hand high.

Second hand low.

Always lead a singleton against a suit contract.

One of my favourites is *Trump Length – Lead Strength*. (You know it must be good because it rhymes). But what exactly does it mean?

Usually when defending a trump contract, the best thing we can do with our trumps is to try and score ruffs. We do this by leading singletons or by trying to give partner a ruff. After all, what else are trumps good for? But consider this hand:

♠ 10 7 6 3 2
♥ 10 8 5
♦ Q J 8 5
♣ 7

♠ A Q 5
♥ 9 6 4
♦ 7 6 3 2
♣ K 10 8

♠ J 4
♥ 7 3
♦ A K 10 9 4
♣ A 5 4 3

♠ K 9 8
♥ A K Q J 2
♦ –
♣ Q J 9 6 2

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West	North	East	South
2♦	2♥	1♦	1♥
All Pass		Pass	4♥

Partner opens 1♦ (East) and declarer (South) ends at the helm in 4♥. We could lead partner's suit or we could lead our singleton. Both are reasonable mantras, but

when it comes to trump contracts, I think singletons are usually the best lead, as is the case today.

On a club lead we are lucky enough to find partner with the ace so they can give us a ruff. Thanks to declarer's void in diamonds, we are unable to cross back to partner's hand for a second ruff, but at least we managed to score two tricks. On any other lead, declarer wins in hand and draws trumps before conceding a single trick to the ♣A.

Now let's make a small change to the hand, as shown overleaf.

Continued overleaf

♠ A Q 5
♥ 9 6 4
♦ 7 6 3 2
♣ K 10 8

♠ 10 7 6 3
♥ 10 8 5 3
♦ Q J 8 5
♣ 7

♠ K 9 8
♥ A K Q J 2
♦ –
♣ Q J 9 6 2

[click to
play
online](#)

West	North	East	South
2♦	2♥	1♦	1♥
All Pass		Pass	4♥

You may be forgiven for not noticing the difference. This time we have one more trump than before but does that matter? On a club lead we can still only score one ruff, but now the value of a diamond lead has gone up.

On the ♦Q lead, declarer ruffs in hand and sets about drawing trumps. And that's when the 4-1 trump break will prove unsurmountable. Because we hold four trumps and because declarer has been forced to ruff, they now have the same number of trumps as us.

If declarer draws all the trumps, they will have none left and partner will have four diamonds to cash when they get in with the ♣A. If declarer postpones drawing all the trumps and attacks clubs early, partner can win and continue the attack on diamonds

... now when declarer ruffs, we will have **more** trumps than declarer. As long as we keep playing diamonds at every opportunity, the contract is doomed to go off. It's worth playing it through on the link.

Just one extra trump made the difference between 4♥ +1 and 4♥ -1, as long as we made the appropriate lead. That's what **Trump Length – Lead Strength** means – when you have a similar number of trumps to declarer, they may be vulnerable to a forcing game. Every time you make declarer ruff, the more likely you are to promote your own trumps and wrest control of the contract away from them.

Of course, simply leading the right thing might not be enough. You may also need to treat your trumps carefully if you fully intend to make the most of them:

Continued overleaf

♠ A Q 5
♥ 9 6 4
♦ 7 6 3
♣ K 10 8 3

♠ 10 7 6
♥ A 8 5 3
♦ Q J 8 5
♣ 7 2

♠ K 9 8
♥ K Q J 10 2
♦ 4 2
♣ A Q J

[click to
play
online](#)

West	North	East	South
			1♥
Pass	1NT	Pass	2NT
Pass	3♥	Pass	4♥
All Pass			

This time our trumps are even stronger, so we waste no time with our forcing defence. We lead the ♦Q and the defence take the

first two tricks. Declarer ruffs the third round of the suit and puts the ♥K on the table. Now it may seem tempting to snap that up with the ♥A so we can play another diamond. But now is not quite the time.

While winning and playing a diamond would force declarer to ruff, it wouldn't force declarer to ruff from their *long* trump holding. With no more diamonds in dummy, declarer can simply take the ruff in dummy and that doesn't help us. A forcing defence is only effective if we can reduce our opponent's trump length because that is how we promote our own trumps.

How do we get around such a problem? Well, clearly the forcing defence would work if declarer couldn't ruff in dummy and so we must work to draw declarer's trumps. How do we do that? By simply letting declarer get on with it!

On the ♥K we should duck the ♥A. We do

the same again when declarer pesters on with the second round of trumps and it is only on the third round that we finally take our ♥A. With the third round of trumps gone, declarer is unable to ruff the diamond continuation in dummy – they have to do so in hand. This reduces their trump length and our fourth trump will be promoted into a winner (after the second round of trumps, declarer will likely stop drawing trumps after seeing the bad break, but that is fine as we will score our fourth trump with a ruff when declarer plays on clubs).

When you have Axxx in trumps it is almost always right to take the ace on the second to last round. If you leave it until last, the trump ace can become stranded in your hand and if you give it up too early you might allow declarer to utilise trumps in both their hand and dummy. □



There are three main signals that you can give your partner by using your small cards (anything between the two and the ten) in a certain order:

- ❖ **Attitude.** A high card to encourage and a low card to discourage continuation of the suit.
- ❖ **Count.** Here you play your cards from lowest upwards to denote holding an odd number of cards and from high to low an even number.
- ❖ **Suit preference.** A suit preference signal is where a high card indicates a liking for the higher-ranked suit, and a low card indicates a liking for the lower-ranked suit (discounting both the suit played and trumps and discounting suits that are an obvious no-no such as AKQ in dummy playing in no trumps).

How do you know which signal to give?

You need to give the signal that is going to be most useful to your partner, but the default position is that your primary signal is for attitude, then for count and then for suit preference.

Consider which card you should play on each of the following:

1

4♠ by South. West leads the ♠K

♠ A K 7 4
♥ 4 2
♦ 9 8 7 3
♣ A 4③

♠ J 10
♥ A 8 5 3
♦ A 6 5 4
♣ J 9 5

North	South
3♣	1♠ 4♣

2

3NT by South. West leads the ♠K

♠ A K 7 4
♥ 4 2
♦ 9 8 7 3
♣ A 4③

♠ J 10
♥ A 8 5 3
♦ A 6 5 4
♣ J 9 5

North	South
2♣ 2NT	1NT 2♥ 3NT

Play the ♣9, encouraging. You want partner to continue the suit since you hold the ♠J, and you can hopefully establish two club tricks to go with your two aces. Remember partner's ♠K lead should promise the queen.


Play the ♣J to 'unblock'. Against a no trump contract a king lead promises the queen and either the jack or ten, and asks you to unblock the ace or jack if you hold it – it would be irritating to win the third club with the ♣J and find you have no way back to partner's hand.

Continued overleaf

3

3NT by South. West leads the $\heartsuit J$

\spadesuit 7 4
 \heartsuit 6 4 2
 \diamondsuit 9 8 $\textcircled{7}$
 \clubsuit K Q J 10 3



\spadesuit J 10 7 5 3
 \heartsuit 8 5 3
 \diamondsuit 6 5 4
 \clubsuit 9 2

North	South
3NT	2NT


Partner leads the $\heartsuit J$. Declarer wins with the ace and leads the $\clubsuit 4$. Partner follows with the $\clubsuit 6$ and dummy's $\clubsuit 10$. What do you play?

Play the $\clubsuit 9$, giving count. Your best hope is that partner holds the $\clubsuit A$ and at least one further club. Partner needs to know how many times to withhold the ace in order to cut declarer off from the dummy.

4

4 \clubsuit by South. West leads the $\clubsuit A$

\spadesuit A K 7 4
 \heartsuit 4 2
 \diamondsuit Q 8 7 3
 \clubsuit Q 8 $\textcircled{4}$



\spadesuit J 10 3
 \heartsuit J 8 5 3
 \diamondsuit 9 6 5 4
 \clubsuit 9 5


North	South
3 \clubsuit	1 \spadesuit 4 \clubsuit

Play the $\clubsuit 9$, encouraging. You want partner to continue with the $\clubsuit K$ and you can complete your signal with the $\clubsuit 5$, and hopefully get your ruff on the third round.

5

4 \clubsuit by South. West leads th3 $\heartsuit 2$

\spadesuit A 8 7 4
 \heartsuit K J 10 $\textcircled{9}$
 \diamondsuit J 8 2
 \clubsuit J 8



\spadesuit J 10
 \heartsuit A 8 6 4 3
 \diamondsuit A 6 5
 \clubsuit 9 5 3

North	South
3 \clubsuit	1 \spadesuit 4 \clubsuit

Partner leads the $\heartsuit 2$ which you win with the ace, declarer playing the $\heartsuit Q$. What do you play next?

Play the $\heartsuit 8$ to signal for suit preference. Don't be fooled by declarer's $\heartsuit Q$ – this lead is a clear singleton since partner would lead top of a doubleton or middle from three low. Return a heart for partner to ruff. By leading the high heart you are signalling for the higher ranking of the remaining suits – in this case diamonds rather than clubs. When you win the $\diamondsuit A$ you will be able to give partner another ruff.

Q1

♠ K J
 ♥ K J 10 8 6
 ♦ 9 6 2
 ♣ 9 7 5

♠ 5 4 2
 ♥ 9 7
 ♦ A K J 3
 ♣ Q 10 8 4

West	North	East	South
Pass	1NT	Pass	1♠
Pass	3♥	Pass	2♥
All Pass			4♥

Your opponents are playing Acol and partner leads the ♦4 (2nd and 4th: standard leads).

- Q1** How many spades and hearts does declarer have?
- Q2** How many diamonds and clubs does declarer have?
- Q3** How many diamonds does declarer have exactly?
- A1** Declarer has shown 5+ spades and 4+ hearts, so all we can say for sure is that they have at least nine cards in the majors.
- A2** Since declarer has shown at least nine cards in the majors, we know that declarer has at most four cards in the minors, but possibly less.
- A3** Partner's ♦4 lead was 2nd and 4th. We can see the ♦2 in dummy and the ♦3 in our hand so we know that it has to be partner's lowest diamond which means it is 4th rather than 2nd. Partner may have led lowest from ♦Qxx, but if it is 4th highest then that means that partner started with four diamonds, leaving declarer with two.

Conclusion: We cannot be sure of defeating the contract. Declarer could be 5-5 in the majors and only have three minor suit losers. And if declarer has the ♣A it is likely that they will be able to throw away dummy's losing clubs on the spade suit. All we know for sure is that we have two diamonds which are definitely cashing. We should take our ♦AK and then switch to clubs. Here's the full deal:

♠ K J
 ♥ K J 10 8 6
 ♦ 9 6 2
 ♣ 9 7 5

♠ 7 6 3
 ♥ 4 3
 ♦ Q 10 7 4
 ♣ A J 3 2

♠ 5 4 2
 ♥ 9 7
 ♦ A K J 3
 ♣ Q 10 8 4

♠ A Q 10 9 8
 ♥ A Q 5 2
 ♦ 8 5
 ♣ K 6

[click to play online](#)

Continued overleaf

Q2

♠ K Q J 9
 ♥ Q J 10
 ♦ Q J 10 3
 ♣ Q 9

♠ A 8 7
 ♥ A 8 4 3
 ♦ K 9 7
 ♣ 10 6 3

West	North	East	South
Pass	2♣ ²	Pass	1NT ¹
Pass	3NT	Pass	4♠
All Pass			
¹ 12-14; ² Stayman			

Your opponents are playing Acoll and partner leads the ♣7 (2nd and 4th). Declarer wins the lead in hand with the ♣J and plays a spade to the king.

Q1 How many spades does partner have?

Q2 How many hearts does partner have?

Q3 Does partner have any good cards in clubs?

Q4 How many points does partner have?

Q5 How many points does partner really have?

A1&2 Declarer has shown both majors by bidding hearts over Stayman and then 4♠ over the correction to 3NT. It is unlikely that declarer opened 1NT with 5/4 in the majors so we can expect declarer to have four cards in each which would give partner two spades and two hearts.

A3 Partner led the ♣7. The only higher clubs missing are the ♠8, ♠K, and ♠A. In short, the ♣7 is too high to be 4th highest so partner must have led 2nd highest which means that they have no useful cards in clubs.

A4 Dummy has 14 points and we have 11 points for 25 total. Add that to declarer's 12-14 and that leaves partner with between 1-3 points.

A5 Partner has three points exactly – specifically the ♥K. We have already figured out that declarer must hold the ♠AKJ. The only other cards missing are the ♥K and the ♦A, and if partner has 1-3 points, that can't be the ♦A.

Conclusion: We know that partner has ♥Kx in hearts as well as two trumps. We should take the ♠A to preserve partner's final trump and underlead our ♥A. Partner can win and return the suit, allowing us to give partner a heart ruff and defeat the contract by one trick. Here's the full deal:

♠ K Q J 9
 ♥ Q J 10
 ♦ Q J 10 3
 ♣ Q 9

♠ A 8 7
 ♥ A 8 4 3
 ♦ K 9 7
 ♣ 10 6 3

♠ 6 5
 ♥ K 7
 ♦ 8 5 4 2
 ♣ 8 7 5 4 2

♠ 10 4 3 2
 ♥ 9 6 5 2
 ♦ A 6
 ♣ A K J


[click to play online](#)

Continued overleaf

Q3

♠ K J
 ♥ K J 10 8 6
 ♦ 9 6 2
 ♣ 9 7 5

♠ 5 4 2
 ♥ 9 7
 ♦ A K J 5
 ♣ Q 10 8 4



West	North	East	South
			1♠
Pass	1NT	Pass	2♥
Pass	3♥	Pass	4♥
All Pass			

Your opponent's are playing Acol and partner leads the ♦4 (2nd and 4th), and declarer follows with the ♦8 under our ♦K.

- Q1** How many spades and hearts does declarer have?
- Q2** How many diamonds and clubs does declarer have?
- Q3** How many diamonds does declarer have exactly?
- A1** Declarer has shown 5+ spades and 4+ hearts, so all we can say for sure is that they have at least nine cards in the majors.
- A2** Since declarer has shown at least nine cards in the majors, we know they have at most four cards in the minors, but possibly less.
- A3** Partner's ♦4 lead was 2nd and 4th. We can see the ♦2 in dummy but we cannot see the ♦3. It's possible that partner has led from Q10743 or Q1074. This means that declarer has either one or two diamonds. However, declarer did follow with the ♦8, rather than the ♦3...

Conclusion: We cannot be sure of declarer's diamond length but declarer's play at trick one is quite telling. You would expect declarer to follow upwards with a useless holding such as ♦83. It would take a very cunning declarer to deliberately conceal the ♦3 from us.


It is not a sure thing, but we should play partner to have led from a 5-card holding and switch to clubs. Switching to the ♣Q or ♣10 is best as this allows us to pick up three tricks when declarer has Kxx. Here's the full deal:

♠ K J
 ♥ K J 10 8 6
 ♦ 9 6 2
 ♣ 9 7 5

♠ 5 4 2
 ♥ 9 7
 ♦ A K J 5
 ♣ Q 10 8 4

♠ 7 6 3
 ♥ 4 3
 ♦ Q 10 7 4 3
 ♣ A J 3

♠ A Q 10 9 8
 ♥ A Q 5 2
 ♦ 8
 ♣ K 6 2




[click to play online](#)

Continued overleaf

Q4

♠ J 10 7 2
 ♥ A J 3
 ♦ K 8 5 4
 ♣ A 9

♠ A 5
 ♥ 10 7 4
 ♦ J 9 7 6 3
 ♣ J 8 7



West	North	East	South
			1NT ¹
Pass	2♣ ²	Pass	2♠
Pass	4♠	All Pass	

¹ 15-17; ² Stayman

Your opponents are playing Standard American and 1NT showed 15-17 balanced. Partner leads the ♣K and declarer goes up with the ♣A, and then leads the ♠J.

Q1 How many spades does partner have?

Q2 How many points in spades does partner have?

Q3 How many diamonds does partner have?

A1 Partner has three spades. There are four spades in dummy and declarer has shown four with their response to Stayman.

A2 Dummy has 13 points and we have 6. Add that to declarer's 15-17 and that gives partner 4-6 points. Partner led the ♣K which accounts for three of those points and they must have the ♣Q as well for their lead to be top of a sequence. That's five points and we can see every jack so partner can hold no points in spades or any other suit.

A3 Declarer opened 1NT promising a balanced hand, so they must hold at least two diamonds, giving partner a maximum of two diamonds. Partner would have led a diamond if they had a singleton, so that suggests that they have two or zero.

Conclusion: There is no point ducking the ♠A as we won't be getting in the way of anything in partner's hand. We should go up with the ♠A to try to give partner a ruff in diamonds. If we are lucky, partner will then underlead their ♣Q to our ♣J so we can give partner another ruff. Partner should be able to work this out if we give positive attitude at trick one or if we give suit preference now by leading our lowest diamond for partner to ruff.

Here's the full deal:




♠ J 10 7 2
 ♥ A J 3
 ♦ K 8 5 4
 ♣ A 9

♠ A 5
 ♥ 10 7 4
 ♦ J 9 7 6 3
 ♣ J 8 7

♠ 8 6 3
 ♥ 9 8 6 5 2
 ♦ –
 ♣ K Q 6 4 2

♠ K Q 9 4
 ♥ K Q
 ♦ A Q 10 2
 ♣ 10 5 3



[click to play online](#)



Last year I wrote about leads against no trump contracts, and started with an exposition of the main difference between leading against suits and no trumps, and why the former tends to be more passive in nature. This year I intend to explore further the idea of active and passive leads against both no trumps and suits. You may have heard people in your club talk learnedly about active and passive leads, but what exactly are they?

❖ Passive leads are ones that try not to give away cheap tricks, so are in general leads from collections of small cards, but not away from an ace or a king for example. Let us be clear that not all leads from honours are passive – to lead the K from KQJ or the A from AK are neither passive nor active – just very good leads. But leading a small card or the A from Axxx is very active and aggressive since when it is

wrong it will be very, very wrong and you need a lot in partner's hand to make it right.

❖ Active leads are the reverse – leading from aces or kings, or suits headed by AQ or KJ are highly active leads. They are much more common in no trump contracts for the reasons given above – if you lead away from AQxxx against no trumps round into declarer's king then you have given declarer a trick they were not entitled to, but if it means you can cash the other four later in the play you have made a handsome profit. That will never happen in suit contracts because declarer will just ruff your long cards.

❖ Leads at duplicate pairs tend to be much more passive than at teams (Imps) both in suits and no trumps. At teams, all your focus is on beating the contract – overtricks are more or less irrelevant. At

pairs every trick counts – if you make an active lead against 3NT to try and beat it and declarer now makes 10 tricks instead of nine you have just scored a bottom. Similarly, it is no good getting a contract one down if everyone else is getting it two down – that is also a bottom.

❖ There are exceptions, but trump leads are mostly very passive. Usually the object is to give nothing away (unless it is to try and stop a crossruff for example). To think of why they are passive, what do you do on most suit hands as declarer – draw trumps as soon as you get in. So it must be a passive defence if you start doing that for them.

So when should you make active leads or passive leads? Anyone who gets that right all the time will be a world champion, and I certainly do not and am not. All you can do is make your best guess on the information

Continued overleaf

available to you from the auction and your own hand. In all cases, the fundamental question to ask yourself is:

‘If left to their own devices is declarer likely to make this contract?’

or, if playing pairs:

‘If left to their own devices is declarer going to make a lot of tricks?’

If your educated answer to that question is ‘yes’ then you have to get active – you have to take risks in order to beat a contract (or restrict overtricks). If the answer is ‘no’ then go passive – don’t give away tricks, make declarer do their own work. It is amazing how many contracts go off by the defence just sitting there like puddings and refusing to open up any suits for declarer. And if the answer to the question is (as it often will be) ‘Well I don’t know!’ then all you can do is

base your decision on your hand and your experience.

Auctions that call for active leads are ones that suggest that declarer or dummy has long suits which declarer can easily establish to throw losers away.

Auctions that call for passive leads are ones that don’t suggest any particularly long suits and often ones that have been reached suggesting only just enough values for game (1NT–2NT, 3NT say). Here you generally don’t want to give away tricks but let declarer do their own work.

Your own hand will help here as well, particularly with any holding you have in known long suits. Say the opposition are in 3NT and dummy is known to hold at least six diamonds. If you, on lead, are holding xxx or even worse say Qxx then this is terrible as the suit will be running for

declarer and that is six tricks before they start. Much better to have (say) a singleton, as partner may well then have stops over the suit.

And what about when the auction tells you nothing, say 1NT–3NT or 1♠–2♠, 4♠? Well, then you are on your own, and you just have to do the best you can. The only advice I can give is that in suit contracts far more contracts are let through by defences that are too active than ones that are too passive. One of the many reasons experts rarely invite is precisely to give away as little information as possible. 1NT–3NT is much more difficult to defend against than a crawl into 3NT because responder can have anything from a wild punt based on a long suit and nothing to a near slam try.

OK, enough waffle – try your hand at the problems overleaf.

Continued overleaf

Hand 1

♠ K 9 5
♥ 6 5 2
♦ K 6
♣ K J 8 7 2

South	West	North	East
		1♦	Pass
1♠	Pass	2♦	Pass
2♥ ¹	Pass	3♦	Pass
3NT	All Pass		

¹ Natural and forcing for one round

What would you lead in teams and at pairs?

Hand 2

♠ 8 6 5
♥ K J 3
♦ K J 4 2
♣ Q 9 2

South	West	North	East
1♠	Pass	2♠	Pass
2NT ¹	Pass	3♠ ²	Pass
4♠ ³	All Pass		

¹ Natural, invitational (17-19); ² weak, to play; ³ ill-disciplined but not uncommon

What would you lead in teams and at pairs?

Hand 3

♠ K 7 4
♥ K 5 3
♦ 10 9 2
♣ J 8 6 3

South	West	North	East
2NT ¹	Pass	4NT ²	Pass
6NT	All Pass		

¹ 20-22; ² invitational to 6NT

What would you lead in teams and at pairs?

Hand 4

♠ K 7 4
♥ K 5 3
♦ 10 9 2
♣ J 8 6 3

South	West	North	East
		1♦	Pass
2♠ ¹	Pass	3♦	Pass
3♠	Pass	4♠	Pass
4NT ²	Pass	5♠ ³	Pass
6♠	All Pass		

¹ Natural, strong; ² RCKB – Roman Keycard Blackwood; ³ Two keycards and the ♠Q

Exactly the same hand, but a different auction.
Does this affect your choice of opening lead?

What would you lead in teams and at pairs?

Hand 5

♠ Q J 7 4
♥ K Q 5 4
♦ 10 9 8 3
♣ 3

South	West	North	East
1♣	Pass	1♥	Pass
1♠	Pass	3♠	Pass
4♠	All Pass		

What would you lead in teams and at pairs?

Hand 6

♠ A J 9 3
♥ 10 9 8 3
♦ 8 6
♣ K 5 4

South	West	North	East
1NT ¹	Pass	3NT	All Pass

¹ 12-14

The opposition have had the simplest of auctions.

What would you lead in teams and at pairs?

Continued overleaf

You are sitting West. Choose your lead:

Hand 1
 ♠ K 9 5
 ♥ 6 5 2
 ♦ K 6
 ♣ K J 8 7 2

South	West	North	East
		1♦	Pass
1♠	Pass	2♦	Pass
2♥ ¹	Pass	3♦	Pass
3NT	All Pass		

¹ Natural and forcing for one round

Passive or active?

This auction and your hand screams for an active lead. Dummy is hitting with at least six and likely seven diamonds. Declarer will be playing on the suit and even with say AQJxxxx opposite a singleton and all seven tricks will fall into their lap. That together with whatever else they can muster in the majors will be a lot of tricks. So:

- (a) ♠5: 2 marks; ♠K/9: 1 mark. Never say never at bridge, but it is almost never right to lead round into declarer's first bid suit – you are just helping them set up tricks in their longest suit.
- (b) ♥any: 6 marks. If I was looking for a passive lead then this is the best I have got. But this isn't the hand for a passive lead for all the reasons given above.
- (c) ♦6: 2 marks; ♦K: 1 mark. Again, this is a horrible lead. It is the suit declarer is about 99% certain to be playing on for tricks. So why are you leading it?

- (d) ♣7: 10 marks; ♣8/2: 6 marks; ♣K/J: 1 mark). This is the standout lead for me. You need to set up tricks fast so that if and when your side gets in you can cash them. But declarer may have ♣AQ you say. And so declarer might. But frankly it is unlikely to matter much – declarer will have a raft of diamond tricks plus whatever they can garner in the majors so is going to end up with a lot of tricks anyway. But declarer may have a holding like ♣Q10x instead, and partner holds ♣Ax. Wouldn't that be nice? You should of course lead the right club in your partnership (4th highest unless you have other agreements).

Pairs bonus: The ♠7: 5 marks. There is a fraction more case to avoid a club lead at pairs, but only a fraction. Declarer is going to make so many tricks anyway if you don't lead a ♣ that you have to try and get at what is your due. After all, you have the ♠K to get in with hopefully. So it is still a ♣ for me.

Continued overleaf

You are sitting West. Choose your lead:

Hand 2

♠ 8 6 5
♥ K J 3
♦ K J 4 2
♣ Q 9 2

South	West	North	East
1♠	Pass	2♠	Pass
2NT ¹	Pass	3♠ ²	Pass
4♠ ³	All Pass		

¹ Natural, invitational (17-19); ² weak, to play; ³ ill-disciplined but not uncommon

Passive or active?

This hand is the mirror of the previous one. The auction and your hand scream for a passive lead. They have minimum (or more likely sub-minimum) values for game, almost all of the strength is on your right and there is no indication of any long suits.

(a) ♠any: 10 marks. I would look no further than a trump lead here. It gives nothing away and actually attacks declarer's best chance of making the contract – ruffs in dummy. 2NT could have been passed and yet dummy went back to spades, so they almost certainly have four trumps (definitely if playing Acol) and probably a ruffing value.

(b) ♥any: 1 mark. Leading from KJ round into a strong balanced hand in a suit contract is just a way to give away tricks.

(c) ♦any: 1 mark. See comment above

(d) ♣2: 5 marks; ♣Q/9: 2 marks. A club has this to be said for it – it is a lot better than a red suit! But really a spade is clear cut here.

Pairs bonus: ♠any: 5 marks. A trump is even more clear cut at pairs. If the contract is making this is likely to limit overtricks and if it is going off this is likely to maximise undertricks.

Continued overleaf

You are sitting West. Choose your lead:

Hand 3

♠ K 7 4
♥ K 5 3
♦ 10 9 2
♣ J 8 6 3

South	West	North	East
2NT ¹	Pass	4NT ²	Pass
6NT	All Pass		
¹ 20-22; ² invitational to 6NT			

Passive or active?

I have said many times that you need to lead aggressively (actively) against slams. But no trump slams are the exception, particularly when, as here, there is no indication of any long suits about, and the auction has been bid on sheer power of HCPs. Plus here, unless the opposition are mad dog wild, partner's contribution to the defence will be limited to not revoking. So you need to husband your resources (spouse your resources perhaps? 🤔) and hope your high cards are sufficient to get two tricks. So the most passive of the passive is called for...

(a) ♠7/4: 1 mark; ♠K: 0 marks. So don't lead away from a king (nor lead it!).

(b) ♥5/3: 1 mark; ♥K: 0 marks. See above.

(c) ♦10: 10 marks; ♦9: 7 marks; ♦2: 9 marks. A diamond is the most passive lead in your hand so make it. It probably won't matter which diamond you lead but there are just a couple of unlikely positions where you need to lead the 10. Leading the nine will confuse partner but it probably won't matter.

(d) ♣8/6/3: 5 marks; ♣J: 1 mark. A club is next best after a diamond but it could give a trick away. Imagine ♣AKQ10 in declarer's hand. So a diamond is to be preferred.

Pairs bonus: ♦10: 5 marks. The same lead for the same reasons.

Continued overleaf

You are sitting West. Choose your lead:

Hand 4

♠ K 7 4
♥ K 5 3
♦ 10 9 2
♣ J 8 6 3

South	West	North	East
2♠ ¹	Pass	1♦	Pass
3♠	Pass	3♦	Pass
4NT ²	Pass	4♠	Pass
6♠	All Pass	5♠ ³	Pass

¹ Natural, strong; ² RCKB – Roman Keycard Blackwood; ³ Two keycards and the ♠Q

Passive or active?

You have exactly the same hand as last time, and in the question I asked you if the different auction affected your lead. Oh yes it does, it really does!

(a) ♠7/4: 3 marks; ♠K: 0 marks. Books always used to say ‘leads trumps against slams’ and the books were wrong! In general trump leads against slams are too passive, and particularly so when they have been bid as confidently as this. South must believe they have a very good chance of 12 tricks even when they are missing a key card (you know which one it is of course). Looking at your hand you know they are right. Your diamond holding is terrible – dummy will come down with six (at least) and declarer will easily be able to set them up and discard any losers on them. So you *must* try and set up a trick quickly to go with your ♠K. And the best chance of that is...

(b) ♥3: 10 marks; ♥5: 6 marks; ♥K: 2 marks

... by leading a heart. You need far less from partner (just the ♥Q) for this to be right than in any other suit. It might be round to the ♥AQ you say. And so it might. But your king won't be making anyway for the reasons given above – all declarer's losers are going on the diamonds given time.

(c) ♦any: 1 mark. There is zero reason to help declarer set up dummy's suit.

(d) ♣3: 6 marks; ♣8/6: 3 marks; ♣J: 2 marks.

If not a heart then I would lead a club, but it is a weaker lead since I need more from partner in the suit to set up a trick – either ♣KQ or possibly just the ♣K with the ♣Q in dummy.

Pairs bonus: ♥3: 5 marks. I have said ‘til boredom has set in that you get no MPs for the opponents bidding and making a slam no matter how obvious it is. You have to go all out to beat it, so the same lead for the same reasons.

Continued overleaf

You are sitting West. Choose your lead:

Hand 5
 ♠ Q J 7 4
 ♥ K Q 5 4
 ♦ 10 9 8 3
 ♣ 3

South	West	North	East
1♣	Pass	1♥	Pass
1♠	Pass	3♠	Pass
4♠	All Pass		

Passive or active?

Here we don't know whether this game is thin or not. North made an invitational bid, but South could have a lot extra – either values or distribution – so that doesn't help much. Looking at our hand we know a number of things declarer doesn't – the trumps certainly aren't breaking and the clubs almost certainly aren't either. That suggests that unless declarer has a lot extra this contract may struggle, and contracts that you think will struggle suggest passive defence.

- (a) ♠any: **1 mark**. Giving away one of your almost certain two trump tricks really isn't a good idea.
- (b) ♥K: **5 marks; ♥other: 3 marks**. This will hopefully set up a trick, but firstly declarer may well be short and secondly it may set up tricks for declarer as well, (say dummy has AJ10x for example – they did bid them after all). Also, any heart tricks you have coming are not

going anywhere – you will come to them in the fullness of time.

- (c) ♦10: **10 marks; ♦other: 7 marks**. This is a standout lead for me. It will give nothing away and may also help to set up any diamond tricks that are our due.
- (d) ♣3: **2 marks**. No lesser player than the great Benito Garozzo said 'When I am dealt a singleton I lead it'. But that was in abstract. The purpose of leading a singleton is to get ruffs – making tricks with your small trumps that you would not otherwise make. But here you are likely to have two trump tricks anyway and taking ruffs will just help declarer by essentially drawing your own trumps for them. It will also tell declarer exactly what the club position is to play it to best advantage.

Pairs bonus: ♦10: 5 marks. The same lead for the same reasons. If the contract is making, a diamond will get any tricks due to you, and if it isn't this should maximise the undertricks.

Continued overleaf

You are sitting West. Choose your lead:

Hand 6

♠ A J 9 3
♥ 10 9 8 3
♦ 8 6
♣ K 5 4

South	West	North	East
1NT ¹	Pass	3NT	All Pass
¹ 12-14			

Passive or active?

I finish deliberately with a hand on which you just don't know, because the auction has been highly uninformative, and your hand does not help much. Is dummy coming down with ♦AQxxxx and a lot of hope or a balanced 13 count? You have no way of knowing so you just have to go on general principles. Interestingly, expert opinion has changed over the years....

(a) ♠3: 5 marks; ♠A: 2 marks; ♠J/9: 1 mark.

When I was learning the game, you would have been considered nuts to lead anything other than a spade – 4th highest of your longest and strongest. From 5-card suits this is still considered correct (and the computer leads agree) but from 4-card suits they are not in vogue anywhere near as much. The problem is not just that you give away cheap tricks, but that even if it is right to lead a spade and partner has as many as four of them

you still haven't beaten the contract, whereas if you are running a 5-card suit off the bat then you have. Only the computers would consider leading the ace.

(b) ♥10: 10 marks; ♥other: 5 marks. Again I think this is a standout. It combines passive and active – you won't give anything away and are starting to set up long cards (with an ace to get back in with no less). Please lead the right card.

(c) ♦8: 2 marks; ♦6: 1 mark. I see no reason to lead this suit – partner's holding will have to be very good for it to be right.

(d) ♣4: 4 marks; ♣other: 1 mark. This could be right if partner has good clubs, but with dummy showing no major suit interest it is far more likely dummy has the minors than partner.

Pairs bonus: ♥10: 5 marks. The case for a heart is overwhelming at pairs.

Continued overleaf

ACTIVE OR PASSIVE LEADS – KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ❖ Whether to lead actively or passively is a hard skill to master, and no one gets it right all the time.
- ❖ Always consider the bidding and draw any inferences you can from it, both positive and negative. Is the contract likely to be close? Are there long suits about? Are both hands likely to be balanced or balancedish? Is declarer or dummy much stronger than the other hand? Is declarer likely to want to ruff a lot of things?
- ❖ Always consider your own hand. Are declarer's suits breaking well or badly? Do you have any surprises for declarer? The more values you have the more likely you will want to go passive against suit contracts.
- ❖ Passive leads are much more common against suit contracts and much more common at pairs.
- ❖ The key question is always, 'Based on the evidence before me, if I leave declarer alone (lead passively), is declarer likely to be able to make their contract (or maximise their tricks in pairs?)' □



A player asked: I was in a redoubled contract at the club. At the end of play the other three players immediately folded their cards and decided that I had gone one down. I objected to the decision because I had left all my tricks on the table which indicated that I made the contract. My understanding of the rule is that no cards should be folded by any of the players until all four players agree the outcome. The director awarded an average – what is the correct decision?

There is always a possibility that either pair could fold up their cards knowing they have lost but can claim the average score rather than suffer 0%.

The law is very much on your side and the director's decision to award an average is not supported by Law 66D:

After play ceases, the played and unplayed cards may be inspected to settle a claim of a revoke, or of the number of tricks won or lost; but no player should handle cards other than his own. If the director can no longer ascertain the facts after such a claim has been made, and only one side has mixed its cards, the director shall rule in favour of the other side.

Law 79B:

If a disagreement arises, the director must be called, then:

- 1. The director determines whether there has been a claim or concession and, if so, applies Law 69B or Law 71.*
- 2. If B1 above does not apply, the Director rules what score is to be recorded.*

The director should attempt to recreate the play, using your unmixed cards as the primary evidence of the order of play. If the director cannot ascertain the facts he must still rule on a score (Law 79B2) – not an

average. If both you and dummy had not folded their cards, and the director cannot ascertain the facts, then the director would be bound to rule in your favour. Given that both defenders had mixed/folded their cards, and declarer had not, the director should tend towards ruling in favour of declarer.

On the last point, there is no need to cast aspersions on the action of the defenders in mixing their cards. This is covered by Law 66D: *and only one side has mixed its cards, the director shall rule in favour of the other side. This requires that the director rules against the side who mixed their cards.*

You should train your partners, as dummy, not to mix their cards until the result is agreed.

Continued overleaf

Could you please clarify the Stayman bid? There is a school of thought that plays Stayman as ‘promissory’ or ‘non-promissory’ and announces as such. I have understood that Stayman was an asking bid and not saying anything about the bidder's hand.

Stayman 2♣ is used to ask for 4-card majors but the responder may have different intentions. Traditional Stayman could be a hand that wanted to play in clubs, and a sign off in 3♣ on the next round would not show any interest in the majors. Whereas, playing 4-suit transfers, responder might bid 2♣ and follow-up with 2NT without a 4-card major.

The terms ‘promissory’ and ‘non-promissory’ are not used the same way by all players. ‘Promissory’ should mean that 2♣ asks for 4-card majors and shows a 4-card major; but ‘non-promissory’ is often used to mean specifically that a 2NT rebid does not show a 4-card major.

According to EBU regulations, 2♣ is announced as ‘Stayman’ if it asks for a

4-card major. The announcement does not include ‘promissory’ or ‘non-promissory’. However, if responder rebids 2NT (or 3NT) and this does not show a 4-card major, this should be alerted.

Although Stayman is an asking bid, it does (by partnership understanding or agreement) say something about responder's hand. Opponents are entitled to know what it says about responder's hand, and they can ask.

If the opponents ask you should tell them whether 2♣:

- ♣ shows a 4-card major, or
- ♣ may be a balanced invitation without a 4-card major, or
- ♣ may not have a 4-card major if it is a weakness take-out in clubs (or diamonds), or
- ♣ whatever it does or does not show in your agreements.

I would not use ‘(non-)promissory’ in the answer, because it is not well understood.

Nigel Hopwood asked: During a recent session a player was told that she could not set the appropriate bidding card at an angle in the box to remind her of the contract. I seem to recall that one is allowed to ask for a reminder of the contract during play. If this is the case then surely it would be ok for a bidding card to act as an aide memoire. Interestingly the Bridgемate operator can always have a sneaky look at the Bridgемate to remind them of the contract! Please could you clear up the rights and wrongs of this for me.

The laws explicitly allow players to ask about the contract, Law 41C:

After it is too late to have previous calls restated, declarer or either defender, at his own turn to play, is entitled to be informed as to what the contract is and whether, but not by whom, it was doubled or redoubled.

The laws explicitly disallow aides-memoire (as aids to memory) Law 40B2(d):

Continued overleaf

Unless the Regulating Authority provides otherwise a player is not entitled to any aids to his memory, calculation or technique during the auction period and play.

Although you may think one should follow from the other, the laws say you can be told what the contract is (if you remember to ask) but you can't have a reminder of the contract as an aide-memoire. This also precludes looking at your scorecard or at the Bridgemate to find out the contract.

Michael Shine asks a follow up to a question in a previous magazine: Is dummy allowed to stop declarer from attempting to place his card pointing the wrong way when placing it in front of him – before any play to the next trick?

Likewise, are defenders able to attempt to stop their partner from doing so?

This was not at all clear until the most recent law book. The 2017 law book has Law 65B3:

A player may draw attention to a card pointed incorrectly, but this right expires when his side leads or plays to the following trick. If done later Law 16B may apply.

So, any player (including dummy) can point out that a card is quitted in the incorrect direction until their side has led/played to the next trick. ☐

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Journey of a Bridge Player

How long have you been playing bridge? Some people play regularly, enjoying the social element and finding their level. Others go to classes for years, enjoying the lessons but hardly putting the concepts into practice. Others are ambitious. Bridge takes a hold in their imagination and they see an English Cap beckoning.

If you want to really improve at bridge you have to play against good players, and you have to ask for advice. It's rude to tell people where they went wrong at the table, so if you would like to know if you could have bid or played better, you may need to ask.

Here's a suggestion of the competitions you might join as you climb the master point ranks. These tournaments give you the chance to meet better players and learn from them.

Did they deceive you – could you copy that? Did they catch your singleton king – how did they know? Did they put you on lead at the end, so you had to give a trick away ... mmm ... something to think about?

There are other things to do as you get your feet under the table at a club. Please volunteer to join the committee – it's not just for the best players and should consist of all levels. The views of the newest members are often under-represented on the club committees. You might want to introduce mentoring evenings, or a social event or a 'date night' to find potential new partners.

There's lots you can do for the club and for your own bridge satisfaction. Here's what you might feel ready for.

MASTER POINT RANKS

Local	Why not try out a café bridge. You will enjoy these wonderful relaxed occasions where you stroll between watering holes playing a couple of hands at each and meeting lots of people. It's sociable and it's not a bit scary. You'd also be very welcome at charity bridge events and might consider a bridge holiday.
Club	You've had a few good results to get this far – congratulations! You can stop feeling nervous. Enjoy yourself and familiarise yourself with the county website to see what's happening locally, and check out My EBU to see your sessions and how you are doing on the National Grading Scheme (NGS). There's lots to see.
Area	OK - You are certainly ready for some county events. Check out the website to see what's going on – counties typically run various pairs and teams events, some of which are 'Swiss'. This means that after the first round you will play people with a similar score to yours. Start looking for a partner who might want to accompany you, and perhaps some team mates. Most counties run a County League with several divisions – form a team – it's great fun. There are also handicapped events where your NGS grade is taken into account.
District County	You could now look at joining a Green-Pointed event. These are run F2F by counties or there are OODGP (Online One-Day Green Point) events run by the EBU. Green points are usually awarded at a higher rate than the points you earn in a club session, as the competition is generally more serious, and they will be needed for some of the ranks you might be aiming for in the future. You will be a regular club player by now, and might consider joining the club committee.
Master	Congratulations - this is known as a Landmark Promotion. It's a big one. You are ready to join anything. Make the most of what's on offer. As an added incentive your EBU account is credited with a £25 voucher to use against entry for any EBU-organised event. You'll find it on My EBU.

In another life, I was asked what the best part of my job was. The people, I instantly replied. And the worst part? The people! Same with bridge, you'll love some, not others. But the challenge of overcoming opposition, making that play you read about last week, finally understanding and carrying out an end play. It's as good as *** and if you are as old as me, it's better!

You now play regularly in your club and have seen a county event advertised on the noticeboard. Should I, shouldn't I? Don't vacillate, enter it! And remember to look on your county website (and the EBU website if you want to try something more adventurous). Competitions bring a wealth of new challenges. At county level and above you'll play against some experienced and better players. If your expert oppos look friendly, and more than a few are, grab the opportunity with

both hands – ask them if you could or should have done something better or differently. Yes, you might have to be a bit bold to ask but honestly it is well worth it. As the saying goes ... think of them in fewer clothes than they are wearing, and you will realise that they, too, are part of the same human race.

The more people that you play against, the more the experience will bring your game on – the more this happens the more enjoyment you will have and, as a side issue, the more friendships you will make. You will have your successes and your failures, but the thing with failure in bridge is that it is there to help you to learn from the pitfalls into which you may have fallen. It's all a learning curve, a massive challenge, and don't let anyone tell you bridge is only a game. It's a wonderful way of life.

UPCOMING EBU EVENTS SUMMER 2025



JUL
11

REALBRIDGE
ONLINE ONE DAY GP SWISS PAIRS

JUL
17-20

SCARBOROUGH
SCARBOROUGH SUMMER CONGRESS

JUL
21-24

VARIOUS CLUBS
BRITISH SUMMER SIM PAIRS

AUG
2

REALBRIDGE
ONLINE ONE DAY GP SWISS PAIRS

AUG
7-10

EASTBOURNE
EASTBOURNE SUMMER MEETING

AUG
26-28

HARROGATE
NORTHERN MIDWEEK CONGRESS

SEP
7

VARIOUS CLUBS
NAT HANDICAP PAIRS CHAMPIONSHIPS

PLAYING IN YOUR FIRST CONGRESS

Most of us get accustomed to playing at our weekly club duplicate sessions, and county or national events can seem a big and sometimes daunting step up. But playing 50 odd boards against a wider range of opponents will give you confidence over time and make your bridge and your partnership understanding better. I hope it will also give you pleasure.

ENTERING

When you decide to enter, do so as soon as you can; it makes it easier for the organisers to gauge numbers. Entry is normally online, and you can often see who else has entered. You may have the option of lunch too, but beware the effect of a good lunch on your bridge!

BEFORE THE DAY

You will need to review your system card, and it is worth spending time with your

partner discussing the details. Do Stayman and transfers apply over a 1NT overcall? What about over a double of their 1NT? What are the strength limitations in each case? If you don't often play together, try and organise a couple of practice sessions too.

ON THE DAY

Leave enough time to arrive at least 15 minutes early. Parking may be a problem. I once had to run about a mile and arrived hot and sweating just in time to lose our first round 20-0, admittedly against the eventual winners. The lesson I learnt was to keep the organisers' telephone number to hand so you can call if you're going to be late, but best of all, arrive early and relaxed.

WHAT TO EXPECT

In a Swiss competition there will usually be six or seven matches of seven or so boards each. Each will last about 55 minutes. If it is a teams competition, you

will score from 0 to 20 Victory Points (VPs) depending how many IMPs you beat or lose to your opponent by. If it is pairs, your score will depend how you do compared to other N/Ss or E/Ws, but it will likewise be converted to VPs to score the match.

When you arrive you will draw for the first round and be allocated a table and direction. The Tournament Director will let you know when the event is ready to begin. They will usually tell you what the schedule is, what prizes are on offer, and when there are breaks. They will remind you about bridge etiquette and (if it is teams) tell the EW pairs where to go for the first round. The TD tells you when to start, much like a club evening. You may be a bit nervous the first few hands, but that will pass as you play your normal bridge game.

DURING PLAY

Playing nearly 50 boards is hard work. Focus is important, but you also need to

Continued overleaf

pace yourself. I've won more VPs than I've deserved by staying alert in the last two matches. Conversely tiredness in the last one has more than once spoiled our chances of glory. That means not investing energy in discussing the hands you have just played, unless it is a simple clarification. You can discuss the rest later. And I find that it can be helpful to get outside for some fresh air and a change of scenery during the break.

You may find that you end a match earlier or later than other tables. If earlier you can take a quick break. If you are the last table to finish, there may be quite a lot of noise around you. But do not be afraid to take the time you need to play or defend a difficult hand. The directors will understand.

If in the play you need to call the director, it is best to put a hand up and say clearly '*Director Please.*' If the reason is not obvious, such as a revoke, it is polite to explain to your opposition briefly why.

When the director comes, as you always would, explain clearly what has happened and whether you want a ruling or guidance. Abide by the director's decision. If you think they have got it wrong, you can make a challenge at the end of the round/match. But they usually haven't.

If the director's decision goes against you, the zen-like calm in which you normally play bridge may be disturbed. I've also known the opposition get upset by our decision to call the director. In these circumstances, I suggest a couple of deep breaths and do your best to concentrate back on the bridge.

AFTER THE FIRST MATCH

A few minutes after all the tables have finished the first match, the computer programme will allocate your next opponent and tell you via the Bridgemate or tablet. In Swiss competitions, at each round you will be matched against a

competitor with a similar score. So after that first match you may head up towards Table 1 with 20 VPs in your pocket, or alternatively in the direction of the bottom table with none.

Whatever has happened, do not despair. I have found myself on bottom table after one match to see the top pair in the county walking towards us. After the second, we went off to lunch with 1 VP out of 40. Things went better in the afternoon, but the point is that even if you are having a horror show, as the day goes on you will find yourself with easier opposition. Conversely, if everything is going right, you will be having a tougher time against the top pairs.

ETIQUETTE

At each table, say hello to your opponents when you or they arrive. It is customary to give a short description of your system (such as Acol, weak no trumps, weak 2 majors). I like to check their discards and signals so I don't have to ask them in play.

Continued overleaf

And at the end of the match, as you move on, thank them and wish them luck the rest of the day.

The vast majority of competitors are, like you, lovely people who just want to enjoy themselves over a good game of bridge. But if your opponents are arguing (it happens) or unwelcoming (rare, but not unknown), your options are to zone them out or to call the director. The first will almost always be preferable.

Do not forget that these are, however, competitive events, and less leeway is given than at a club evening. On arrival at a table, give your system card to the opposition for the duration of the match. They can then, when it is their turn to call, refer to it if you alert a bid. Always use the stop card if you jump in the bidding and wait the regulation ten seconds. If you want to claim, give a clear indication of how you will play the remaining cards. Occasionally you will find

an opponent who tries to take advantage of a lapse: 'you didn't designate which spade, so play the lowest'. It might be a good idea to call the TD in situations like this – after all TDs are there to help you, and know how to deal with irregularities.



THE LAST ROUND

As the last round approaches, you may find yourself vying for glory, or near the bottom with little to play for. If things have gone well, it is important to focus on your bridge during the last seven boards and not think about the result. If you've had a bad

day, do not give up: you can regain some pleasure from a hand well bid or played or defended. You may find yourself up against a good pair who decide to swing the bat in the aim of getting among the prizes. If you are lucky, you may find you benefit from that if, as sometimes happens, it doesn't work out for them.

WHEN IT IS OVER

You may finish before other tables. There is nothing to stop you leaving then, but organisers appreciate it if you stay behind for the prize giving. I like to go over the hands with my partner to see what we could have done better, but I prefer to wait for a night's sleep before doing that. Most importantly, I hope you will be able to look back on the day and say to yourself that you got something good out of it, whether pleasure, satisfaction, improved partnership understanding, or, dare I say it, even a prize. □

Give Yourself a Chance in the National Handicap Pairs

Hats off to a national event where any pair can win, or do well. It's certainly a competition to consider entering.


The principle of handicapping is well established in many sports such as golf and horse racing and in games such as chess. The stronger contender has to accept a disadvantage such as more weight to carry or less time, or fewer shots. The desired outcome of the handicapping process is to make a competition meaningful. The perfect outcome would result in everybody finishing equal first ... or last. Of course, it doesn't work out like that as both horses and bridge players can play better or less well than expected on the day but handicaps give everybody an equal chance of their day in the spotlight.

The National Grading System in bridge is perfectly suited for handicap competitions. A lower-rated pair can compete on equal terms with a couple of stars. It has been used in many clubs either regularly or as an annual event.

In the National Handicapped Pairs Championship your rating (handicap) will be based on the average NGS of you and

your partner. To do well you simply have to play better than expected based on your NGS – anyone can win this event just by having a sufficiently good day!

The event will be played both F2F at clubs around the country, and online, with the results from heats combined and match-pointed across the field, like a

simultaneous pairs event. There will be blue points at national level to the top third of the field and prizes too based on the overall handicapped ranking list. Perhaps more important than points and prizes is the joy and delight for lower-ranked players who finish near the top, and that could be you! 



National Handicap Pairs Championship

7th September 2025, various locations

Play in this special Pairs event which gives everyone a chance of doing well. The results are based on your score combined with your NGS grade, giving you a fair chance against all players, however good they are.

If your club is not already running a heat,
why not ask them to sign up

More details at:
www.ebu.co.uk/competitions/handicap-pairs



Games for Progressing Players



100 Deals for 100 Years

A new series of five Blue-Pointed 20-board games run online on RealBridge in conjunction with the Super Sunday Special games run by Cumbria on behalf of the EBU.

Open to all players!

Held on the first Sunday of each month, from August to December 2025, 7pm, RealBridge
20 Boards (Matchpoint Pairs) £2.50 per person per session

To enter or for more information:
<https://www.ebu.co.uk/competitions/100-deals-100-years>



“Relaxed” Games on BBO

Join the EBU daily
“9-high Relaxed Games”
on Bridge Base Online
at 11am or 7.30pm

12-board games only \$2.30

These games are for players without too much experience, with an NGS no higher than 9, and run at a slower pace than our other regular daily games.

To enter, or for more information:
www.ebu.co.uk/competitions/events-less-experienced-players or Tel: 01296 317203

Did you know that there are lots of games especially for progressing players (Up to 7 and 9 on the NGS*) – see left – and look out for other games organised by teachers, clubs and your county. It’s a great way to take a step into duplicate bridge – nothing improves play as much as playing! Members who need to buy BB\$ to play in paid games should buy them through the BBO website and not through the app, which often adds on a significant surcharge. Here are testimonials from people who have taken part in games specifically for less-experienced players:

Many thanks for your input regarding Saturday’s tournament - really enjoyed it - looking forward to the next.

I really enjoyed the event and thank you for sorting us out with another pair.

I was very nervous at the start but thoroughly enjoyed it. Thank you.

Hadn’t played more than 16 boards before, didn’t realise you could play as many as 24!

Thank you for organising the event, really enjoyed the afternoon even if we didn’t do very well. Let me know when the next one is.

Excellent experience, thank you for inviting us to play.

Although daunting, the Midlands teams tournaments 9-high and 6-high this year have been excellent experience, getting us newbies ready to get back to club play asap and face the experienced players with more confidence.

The ability to look back at the hands played in the EBU daily U9s tournaments has really helped my play. I can talk though our games with partner and apply the lessons learned to our conventions and play. So much more helpful than playing in friendlies on BBO or club games against really experienced players where we can’t easily understand their bidding.

Ref 9-high and 6-high events: These events are great fun; you could describe it as speed dating meets online bridge (not that I’ve tried the former!). Seriously though, in the two events in which I participated, I’ve met players, in their homes, from as far afield as Cornwall to Derbyshire, and Northampton to the Welsh borders. It’s terrific to discover there are so many people around the country enjoying the game as much as me! □

** for details of the NGS see page 87*

EBED Monthly free Generation Game

Mention the Generation Game to older players and the mind conjures up TV game shows where teams of older and younger relatives attempt virtually impossible tasks for the amusement of the viewing public every Saturday night.

Times have changed but the idea of older and younger people working together towards a common goal has its merits –



especially where bridge is concerned.

Back at the end of 2023, with support

from RealBridge, EBED introduced a free monthly event called the *Generation Game*. Pairs are encouraged to mix age groups. These can be parent, grandparent, carer or teacher playing with inexperienced youngsters (or any other combination you can think of) regardless of location.

Using different RealBridge sessions players can choose either MiniBridge or bridge so all abilities are catered for – with a director and helpers on hand too. Over the last six months many of our regulars have moved from our MiniBridge room to our bridge room – demonstrating their development.

With over 10 tables, the *Generation Game* is a friendly bridge practice game that



delivers a duplicate experience. The RealBridge software eliminates many errors that you may experience in F2F bridge allowing the hands to play smoothly and the participants to concentrate on their defence or declarer play.

Retaining the player link for previous sessions enables participants to revisit the scores and compare them against other tables – plus you can drill down into each hand and review the full order of play, card by card if you wish.

If you are already playing trick-taking

Continued overleaf

EBED Monthly free Generation Game

games with your family and thinking about starting to play bridge, MiniBridge is definitely the way forward. In MiniBridge the auction is put to one side and players simply announce their high card points. This determines who plays declarer and dummy after which everyone reviews dummy before declarer nominates the final contract they wish to play in.

Anyone who can cope with MiniBridge online could easily play in the *Generation Game* – the other seats at the table are filled with real people. Not only do we get the opportunity to play bridge we can interact naturally with others at our table using live audio and video.

Would you like to join us to see what it's all about?

The *Generation Game* takes place on a Sunday evening from 6.30 pm to 7.30 pm but we recommend taking your place by 6.15 pm to allow for tables to be made up and connection issues resolved. Up to 20 boards can be played but there is no time limit allowing each table to move along at its own pace. You can find the programme of events and contact details for the session on this link:

www.ebu.co.uk/article/generation-game-new-weekend-bridge-game-ebed ☐



You can also practice MiniBridge online with this BBO resource:

<https://www.bridgebase.com/edu/minibridge/>

Celebrate your Bridge Achievements with Master Points

The Master Point Scheme is run by the EBU. Master Points are awarded for finishing in the top third in competitions run by the EBU, counties and affiliated clubs, or external competitions licensed by the EBU. The points are awarded on a scale according to the size and status of the competition.

Master Points are credited to your account automatically – you do not need to do anything.

LOCAL, BLUE, GREEN & GOLD POINTS

Local points (black points) are typically awarded in club competitions. Blue points are awarded in some club and County competitions, some minor national competitions, and in the EBU's Simultaneous Pairs. Green points are awarded in most national events, and select county competitions. Gold Points are not part of the main Master Point scheme. They are a separate scheme, used to recognise the current 'form' of elite players.

RANKINGS

There are over a dozen different rankings which you can achieve. The early ranks are reached by most players. The top

ranks are only achieved by a small percentage of members in their lifetime. [A list of rankings can be seen here.](#)

To reach some rankings you must earn green points, rewarding those who take part in higher level competitions. Your ranking is calculated automatically, and can be seen on My EBU.

PROMOTIONS

All promotions (other than for those members who have chosen not to be listed) are on our website, with a new list posted every month. [Click here for a link to Promotions.](#)

Promotion to one of four landmark ranks is recognised by a listing in *English Bridge* magazine, and the receipt of a certificate. Those achieving the rank of Master receive free entry to the annual Masters Pairs event. [Click for a link to the Masters Pairs.](#)

ANNUAL COMPETITION

There is an annual Master Point competition, with prizes for winners in various categories and covering all ranks. For details see www.ebu.co.uk/masterpoint-reports.

If you do not wish to appear on any promotions list, you can change the setting on your preferences in My EBU. ☐

The National Grading Scheme (NGS) measures an individual's current level of performance when playing duplicate bridge.

Unlike the Master Point Scheme (*see p64*), which reflects lifetime achievement, the NGS reflects an individual's **current** standard of play. It can go down as well as up.

Your grade is calculated automatically based on the results submitted to the EBU, and is updated each time you play. In simple terms, it looks at how well you performed compared to what would be expected against the opposition you are facing, and given the standard of your partner.

Grades are divided into 13 bands, ranging from a 'Two' through to an 'Ace'. The Ace category is then subdivided, with very few players reaching an Ace of Spades.


When you first start playing in duplicate tournaments you won't have a grade as you have not played enough hands for one to be calculated. Your grade is not published, and your partner's NGS will not be affected, until you have played 150 boards. Once you have played 150 boards, but less than 1,000, your grade is considered to be 'evolving'. Once you have played 1,000 boards

you have a 'mature' grade. Your grade (between 0 & 100) represents the percentage score it is estimated you could expect on average if you hypothetically played with a player of the same grade, against a field of average (50) strength.

You can see your grade, how recent results have affected it, and the grade of your different partners and partnerships, on My EBU. Grades are available publicly at www.ebu.co.uk/ngs. If you wish to hide your grade so it is not made public, you can change the setting on your preferences in My EBU – your grade will still be calculated, and you will still be able to see it in My EBU.

WHAT AFFECTS YOUR GRADE?

Your grade is affected only by how well you and your partner perform relative to expectations. It doesn't matter if you play with an international or a beginner, and in a club game or a national competition. All that matters is whether you got a better score than the scheme thinks you should have done, given who you were playing with and who you were playing against.

There are some myths that the NGS doesn't work in certain scenarios. Many were dispelled in a historical article at: www.ebu.co.uk/documents/miscellaneous/ngs/clark-article.pdf and we have recent research that confirms this. 

Best Behaviour at Bridge



- ♥ Greet others in a friendly manner prior to the start of play on each round.
- ♥ Be a good 'host' or 'guest' at the table.
- ♥ Make your system card readily available to your opponents and fill it out completely (required).
- ♥ Make bridge enjoyable for yourself, partner and opponents.
- ♥ Give credit when opponents make a good bid or play.
- ♥ Be friendly to novices & help them to enjoy the game.
- ♥ Take care of your personal grooming.
- ♥ Ensure that your mobile phone is turned off.
- ♥ Enjoy the company as well as the game.

Remember that it is rude to criticise your partner or opponents in public, to be less than polite at the table, to gloat over good results or object to a call for the tournament director or to impolitely argue about a director's ruling, or generally to make any personal and disparaging remark.

The small print:

As in all games that are governed by rules and regulations, bad behaviour will be penalised

If a player at the table behaves in an unacceptable manner, the director should be called immediately. Annoying behaviour, embarrassing remarks, or any other conduct which might interfere with the enjoyment of the game is specifically prohibited by Law 74A. Law 91A gives the director the authority to assess disciplinary penalties. This can include immediate disciplinary board penalties and may lead to disqualification from the current event. In addition any violation may result in a disciplinary hearing where a player's future participation in tournaments will be considered.

Please call the Director if you think you may have been affected by bad behaviour.

You will be helping others as well as yourselves.

Turkey Congress



**5-star Sense De Luxe Hotel
near Side, Turkey
5th - 12th October**

Visit the beautiful turquoise Turkish coast, near the old town of Side. Relax at the hotel's private beach area with free parasols and sun loungers.

To find out more call 01296 317203 or visit
ebu.co.uk/competitions/turkey



**PERFECT
EVENTS FOR
MASTERS
AND ABOVE**

Jack High Events

**14 Sept & 9 Nov,
RealBridge**

Open to everyone with an NGS
grade of Jack and below

More information:
ebu.co.uk/competitions/online-9-high-jack-high-events



Madeira Congress



**5-star Melia Madeira Mare, close to
Funchal, Portugal, 2nd - 9th February 2026**



Visit the beautiful island of Madeira. Enjoy the mild temperatures and exquisite floral displays

To find out more call 01296 317203 or visit
ebu.co.uk/competitions/turkey



Every member of an EBU club is automatically a member of the EBU – which includes access to a personal web portal called My EBU. This has been developed and improved over many years, and enables members to view and analyse their results, see their master point progress, and book events of every kind, from social bridge to top congresses.

LOGGING ON

The first step with My EBU is to log on. To do that, head for the EBU home page and click or tap the red link called My EBU. On a smartphone, there is no red link but there is a Menu you can tap, with My EBU the top link.

That will get you to the log in screen. Here, you need to know your EBU number and your password. Your club secretary or scorer can tell you your number, if you are not sure. If you have forgotten your password, or never had one, follow the link for that and enter your

number in our password reset page. This depends on the EBU knowing your email address. If nothing seems to work, call us on 01296 317200 and we will sort it out!

YOUR SESSIONS

The first page you will see in My EBU is a list of all the sessions you have played this year. There is a lot of information here and it can be confusing. It starts with the date, which is easy enough, and then the

SID (Session ID) which you can safely ignore! Then comes the club where the session was played, your partner, and the score, normally a percentage but sometimes a plus or minus figure showing the IMPs (International Match Points) for a teams match. Next it shows the master point award, and after that three figures relating to the NGS (National Grading Scheme).

Continued overleaf



What is the NGS? This is a grade which is an approximation of your current bridge performance relative to everyone else! If it is 50% you are exactly in the middle, though a low NGS is nothing to worry about; what really counts is enjoying the game. It is always nice to improve though, and the three figures shown for every NGS-graded session tell you how you did. The first is the SOpp – Standard of Opposition – which tells you how strong or weak the session was. Again it is a percentage; above 50% means the players were above average overall. Any player will expect to score less well in a strong field.

Then comes the Par. This is how you did considering your own grade before the session alongside the SOpp. If it is positive and green, you did well; if it is red and negative, better luck next time! Finally, the NGS column shows your grade following the session.

You can also sneak a look at how everyone else in the session did. Click the link in the Club column to see all the scores and NGS results. It is quite fun to sort by the NGS column; then you see who really did well, considering their normal result, as opposed

to simply seeing the usual suspects towards the top.

The NGS tab gives you another view of your grade performance, with a pretty chart and a list of your partnerships. The NGS gurus tell us that the partnership grades are more accurate than individual grades, a point to ponder!

MASTER POINTS

Unlike the NGS grade, your master points can only go up with the exception of Gold points! Click or tap the Masterpoints tab at the top of the My EBU screen to see your current totals and rank. You can also click to view your Personal Masterpoint Report which shows how you ranked in the last year compared to others in your club, county and nationally.

Utilities menu: here you can find entries for booking events and courses as well as other features. Using Book Events, you can secure your place in any current EBU event – though be careful, as some events have specific entry requirements. You can find out more about the competitive events here www.ebu.co.uk/competitions/events-summary

Magazine menu: here you can find recent issues of the *English Bridge* and *Discovery* magazines, as well as a link to the web library of older issues.

Account: This menu has several options including My Details, a page where you can set your preferences and information for various things. Some to note:

Date of birth: Please fill this in if not already done! It helps us in planning and we will not divulge your birthday to anyone!

Magazine/Diary preferences: We only send the diary to those who want one, to save cost and postage. Tell us here if you want it. You will receive the magazine unless you opt out – in which case you can still read it online. Two players in one household receive one copy of the paper magazine unless they request for more copies to a single household.

Anonymous, Public Masterpoints and NGS Preference: These settings control whether other people can see your grade and points record. Some feel they enjoy bridge more without thinking about their grades, so if that is you, you might want to hide them out of the way! ☐

DID YOU KNOW you can use your club's website to analyse hands you have played?

Many clubs use BridgeWebs to host their website. The results are uploaded to the site and hand records and analysis are usually available. If it was an online game you may even be able to see the bidding and play on each board.

Bridge can throw up some intriguing results! A hand I placed recently had N/S playing in 3NT and making 10 tricks at one table, while at another E/W played in 2NT and made 6 tricks – getting an outright top! How was it that the two sides made such a divergent number of tricks, both in no trumps?

If the game was played online, BridgeWebs, or strictly the Bridge Solver Online (BSOL), can tell you. Head to your club's BridgeWebs site and find the session. Click on a pair or player in the ranking. You will see on the right that you can select any board by clicking on its number, and below the board, the results for all the pairs that played the board.

Now, how was it played? The method depends on whether you use the Classic or 2022 version of the results page – this is an

option towards the top of the page. Here is how to replay it: In the Classic edition, click the Play button by the result you want to replay.

View Larger

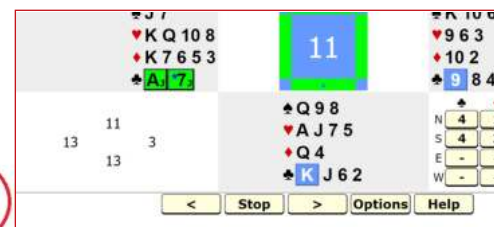
Play it again

Board No 11 None Vul Dealer South

NS	EW	Bid	By	Ld	Tks	+Sc	-Sc	+	-	Play
4	1	2NT	S	♦5	8	120		2	4	Play
5	3	2NT	S	♦5	10	180		4	2	Play
6	8	3NT	S	♦5	10	430		6	0	Play
7	2	2NT	W	♣3	6	100		0	6	Play

This will open the hand viewer. You may be prompted to choose which hand viewer to use. If so, I suggest you select BSOL (Bridge Solver Online), created by John and Miriam Goacher for the bridge community. The board will open showing the bidding at that table. What is a bit less obvious is that you now need to click the highlighted box in the 'Possible contracts' grid for the suit and player for that board. If you click on the matching box, you will get arrow buttons that let you step through the board card by card as it was played, complete with an analysis showing how many tricks can be made by the pair about to play, according to which card is chosen and assuming perfect play from both sides.

In the example below, West will only make three tricks against best defence, in the hopeless contract of 2NT, indicated by the small number 3 in the two possible cards that can be played to the opening trick.




The forward and back buttons below the hands enable you to step through every card played.

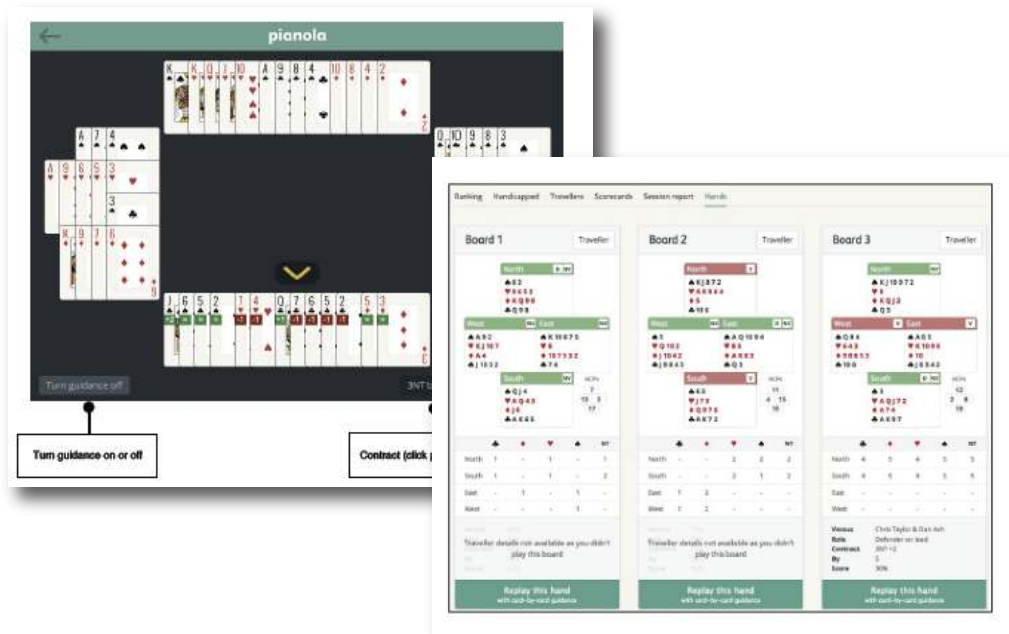
If you are using the 2022 view, it is similar but slightly different. It is all the same up to the point when you select the board number. Then, click 'Replay' by the result you want to play through. The Bridge Solver Online now appears below the results, not in a popup window, so you might need to scroll down to see it. After that it is the same: click the highlighted box in the grid of possible declarers and suits, and you will be able to step through the hand card by card.

If you cannot see the bidding and play at all, it might be because the session was not online, or the scorer did not upload the

results with all the information. If you cannot see the cards, it might be that the session was dealt manually, or that the scorer did not upload the deal file to BridgeWebs.

There is a lot more to see on BridgeWebs, including competitions that the club may have set up, and sometimes features like 'find a partner'. The play analysis though is particularly fascinating and a great way to explore how the best (or luckiest) players got their good results.

Pianola is another popular platform for hosting clubs' websites, and has many similar features. RealBridge games too are often replayable on the RealBridge site, with the options to change the play half-way through the game to see how it might affect the result. It's really worth giving some time to exploring all the available options. Most of it is pretty intuitive, so get going and discover whether the slam you bid and made was brilliant or lucky, and the contract you failed to make was bad luck, bad play or bad bidding! Check what the better players did - how they bid and played it. There's always so much to learn, but beware - 'double dummy analysis' is a 'could have' position, not a 'should have' position. *See article on next page.* 



Clubs using Pianola also benefit from a wealth of information and replay options (images above). There's a Pianola guide at <https://tinyurl.com/2307Pianologuide>

Bridge results software has become very good at showing what is called *double dummy analysis* of any board and often, any position. It is frequently fascinating and may tell you, for example, that declarer can make the contract by leading the ♠8 at trick three, but can go down if the ♦3 is led. Sometimes working out why is quite a puzzle!

In a nutshell, double dummy analysis is a mathematical solution to the maximum number of tricks that can be made given optimum play by both pairs, and full knowledge of all the hands. It is called double dummy because if a player could see their own hand and two dummy hands, then the cards in the fourth hand would also be known by elimination.

Double dummy analysis has been around for many years, and is now available through free and open source software.

However, US bridge player Matthew Kidd, who wrote an early double dummy analysis program for the American Contract Bridge League (ACBL), warned that ‘double dummy results must be taken with a healthy dose of skepticism,’ as they may depend on play that is against the odds, such as dropping a singleton king with the ace. ‘Many new players look at the double dummy results and feel they have done something wrong if they do not match the computer generated result. This is a serious misconception’, the article observed. See <https://lajollabridge.com/Software/ACBLmerge/ACBLmergeReport.htm>

The conclusion? Double dummy analysis is very useful and studying it can improve our play – but it is incapable of telling us the best single dummy play and not at all suitable for berating either yourself or your partner for not bidding game or choosing a different line of play! □



The advertisement is a 3x2 grid of colored boxes. The top-left box is red and contains the EBU logo. The top-right box is green and contains the text 'EBU SOCIAL BRIDGE ON REALBRIDGE'. The middle-left box is blue and contains the text 'play casual bridge online within your own social circle'. The middle-right box is red and contains the text 'BOOK VIA MY EBU'. The bottom-left box is green and contains the text 'THREE SESSIONS DAILY 9AM-1PM 2PM-6PM 7PM-11PM'. The bottom-right box is red and contains the text 'PLAY UP TO 20 BOARDS' and 'JUST £5 FOR THE WHOLE TABLE'. At the bottom, a small line of text reads 'FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT COMPS@EBU.CO.UK'.

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